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**Divide and Slaughter: Bridging the Gap Between Animal Rights and Racial Justice  
Through an Analysis of the Link Between Slaughterhouses and Domestic Violence**

By

**Kailey McNeal**

A Thesis  
Submitted to Pitzer College  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Political Studies Major

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Professor **Nancy Neiman**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis concerns the injustices present in industrial animal agriculture in the United States, domestic violence, and their disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Despite the work of social movements centered around domestic violence and the slaughterhouse, the state of both continues to worsen, particularly for communities of color. My research seeks to uncover what factors preclude the efficacy of these movements. A qualitative analysis of the labor advocacy and animal rights movements in the slaughterhouse and the domestic violence advocacy movement suggests that the current disparate framings of these injustices and a lack of attention to race contribute to the inadequate policy approaches. Building upon other scholars' work establishing the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, I explore the ways in which three movements, animal rights, slaughterhouse labor advocacy, and domestic violence are interwoven through their causes' shared roots in violence to animals and racism. Consequently, I argue that effective policy approaches to all three of these movements require the recognition of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence and the integration of animal rights and racial justice. I conclude with practical policy recommendations that organizations might use to achieve this integration and my vision for the future of advocacy in and around the slaughterhouse.

*Keywords:* slaughterhouse, domestic violence, animal rights, labor advocacy, racial justice, meatpacking

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## **Divide and Slaughter: Bridging the Gap Between Animal Rights and Racial Justice through an Analysis of the Link Between Slaughterhouses and Domestic Violence**

My research concerns the interconnectedness of two sources of suffering in the United States: industrialized slaughterhouses and domestic violence. Currently, the issues within the slaughterhouse, namely worker maltreatment and the condition of farmed animals, are tackled separately by labor advocacy groups and the animal rights movement, respectively. My thesis argues that these disparate attempts to ameliorate the treatment of beings in the slaughterhouse are ineffective and that they should be integrated through their link with domestic violence. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, I explore the ways in which activists can use domestic violence to theoretically and practically link the struggles within the slaughterhouse. Two scholarly works, one by Fitzgerald et. al (2009) and another by Jacques (2015), demonstrate a quantitative link between the siting of slaughterhouses in a community and increased rates of domestic violence in that community. However, despite the identification of this link, the movements working to address slaughterhouses and domestic violence are not as intertwined as their issues seem to be. Each movement has historically single-focused approaches to their causes, seemingly unaware of or, in some cases, resistant to acknowledging any relationships between one another. Moreover, despite both injustices in the slaughterhouse and domestic violence disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Black, Indigenous, and people of color, low-income, immigrant, and incarcerated folks), domestic violence advocacy and animal protection, in particular, share a history of centering whiteness that shapes their movements' strategies and contributes to their ineffectiveness. Consequently, even in the face of mounting efforts by the animal protection community, domestic violence organizations, and

slaughterhouse labor advocacy groups, domestic violence and exploitative animal agriculture remain prevalent in the United States and continue to worsen. Leaning on the established link between these two realms, domestic violence and slaughterhouses, as well as its differential effect on marginalized communities, my research strives for a more robust analysis of the root of these issues and an explanation as to why the current movements' strategies are failing. In answering this question, I argue that it is necessary to acknowledge the confluence of racial justice, animal protection, and domestic violence advocacy in order to adequately address the multifaceted link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence and craft policies to eradicate the suffering in both domains.

The animal agriculture industry in the United States is a significant contributor to the country's economy and culture and also at the heart of immense pain and suffering to humans and nonhuman animals.<sup>1</sup> Animal agriculture consists of the slaughter and processing of nonhuman animals and their byproducts (honey, dairy, eggs) for human consumption. While animal agriculture takes many forms in the United States, from small family farms to large-scale industrial factory farms, the majority of farmed animal production is limited to a small number of industrial slaughterhouses (Sibilla, 2020). There are approximately 800 federally inspected, industrial slaughterhouses in the U.S., also known as "factory farms," mainly in rural areas, utilizing millions of workers and animals to support food production (*Livestock*, 2020; *Poultry*, 2020). Animal product consumption is a staple in most Americans' diets, with 166.4 million animals killed for food every year in the U.S. alone. Meat (which I use to refer to any animal flesh eaten by humans, including poultry), dairy, and eggs also play a significant role in the cultural value of food, with many traditional foods, such as Black soul food, tied to the use of these animal products in their family recipes (Peartree, 2021). Cooking chitlins (pig intestines)

with Grandma at every Christmas dinner or eating cheeseburgers (meat from a cow) with your cousins at the annual summer pool party can be essential aspects of identity formation and familial bonding, and those specific foods become salient reminders of one's culture and connection to their community.

However, despite the constructive nature of meat in this context, the process of meat production within the slaughterhouse is quite destructive. While many Americans consume meat, only a handful are involved in the process of slaughter and those involved are largely members of marginalized groups: Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and immigrants. As of 2018, there were 498,848 slaughterhouse workers in the United States and over 65 percent of those workers were BIPOC and 37.5 percent were immigrants (Stuesse & Dollar, 2020). Compare that to the demographics of the overall workforce in the United States, which is 36.5 percent BIPOC and 17.1 percent immigrant. The working conditions in the slaughterhouse are dangerous, stressful, and exploitative. Slaughterhouses are organized as an assembly line on the kill floor with workers at each station repeating the same motions throughout an entire shift. Positions on the line range from stunning animals in preparation for slaughter, to slitting the animals' throats, skinning the animal, and slicing the animals' dead corpses into meat that can be packaged for sale to consumers. Workers are forced to work long hours, often without bathroom breaks, exposed to blood, diseases, and the use of sharp machinery at ever-increasing line speeds (When we're, 2019). Slaughterhouse laborers suffer from respiratory difficulties, physical trauma (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome, rotator cuff injuries, amputations), and the psychological trauma of witnessing constant death. And, workers are often manipulated into accepting these conditions by management due to the vulnerable communities from which slaughterhouses tend to hire employees, including those benefitting from welfare such as food stamps, incarcerated

folks, BIPOC, and immigrants (both documented and undocumented) (Cook, 2004, p.212; Dillard, 2008, p.397).

The treatment of nonhuman animals within the slaughterhouse is also cause for concern. Regardless of whether you condone the killing of farmed animals for human consumption, the manner in which animals are killed in industrialized slaughterhouses is extraordinarily violent and, as I will describe in the later subsection, “Violence to Farmed Animals and Violence to Humans,” it is traumatic for both the animals themselves and the people who must kill them.<sup>2</sup> Despite the mechanized and routinized configuration of the slaughterhouse assembly line, it still relies on the actions of living beings who are unpredictable and accident-prone. At each stage there is room for error and this is particularly consequential in the killing process. The stun gun, used to initially render the animal unconscious before slaughter, is not always effective in paralyzing the animal (*Michael Pollan*, n.d.). This means that the animal is at least partially awake and sentient during the next step in the process in which the animal is hoisted upside down onto a conveyor belt to hang while a worker slits the animal’s throat and drains the body of blood. *Exposée* videos from undercover animal activists posing as slaughterhouse employees show cows flailing and shrieking as they are raised into the air and blood gushes out of their bodies (Loria, 2016). While the animal makes a futile attempt at escape, workers must wrestle to restrain the writhing animal and maintain their own safety, often leading them to find their own alternative methods of slaughter with the tools at their disposal. Farmed animals are punched, kicked, stabbed, and beaten to death as workers fight to diffuse the situation efficiently and resume the normal functions of the line. Even when this slaughter process does go as planned, farmed animals are tightly packed into small spaces, unable to move, whilst hearing the screams and smelling the blood of animals desperately fighting for their lives nearby while both in transit



to the slaughterhouse and in holding areas prior to slaughter. The current processes involved in industrial animal agriculture reflect the values of the large-scale, profit-driven animal agriculture industry and its disregard for the welfare of animals.

Domestic violence is another, unfortunately, ever-present stain on our society that disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Domestic violence is defined by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence as “willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another” (*Learn More*, n.d.). This violence can include physical and emotional abuse and is perpetrated and experienced by all genders. Approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men will experience intimate partner or family violence within their lifetime in the United States (Domestic Violence Statistics, n.d.). This violence is not limited to adults, as 1 in 15 children will have exposure to domestic violence every year, both as eyewitnesses and as victims themselves (*Statistics*, n.d.). The impact of this violence is also not just limited to within the home. In fact, survivors of domestic violence lose, on average, a total of 8 million workdays due to violence each year (*Statistics*, n.d.). So in addition to the emotional and physical toll violence takes on a survivor, there are also economic consequences. Women of color are particularly susceptible to this type of violence, with Black women being 35 percent more likely to experience domestic violence than white women and Indigenous women experiencing domestic violence at higher rates than women of any other race (Eyler, 2006, p.2; *Domestic Violence Against*, 2016). This disproportionate effect on women of color is particularly salient when combined with the economic burden of domestic violence, as women of color are already disadvantaged wage-earners within the American workforce, making only a fraction of what white men do (Sheth et. al, 2021).

Despite the grave state of the slaughterhouse and domestic violence in the U.S., the movements working to end suffering in both domains are not prevailing. Slaughterhouse labor and farmed animal protection advocates both struggle against the booming industry of factory farms and domestic violence persists throughout communities, despite countless efforts by government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Additionally, these injustices, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities, continue to worsen in a society in which marginalized groups are in crisis mode. With systemic racism, police brutality, humanitarian crises at the U.S.-Mexico border, and rampant socioeconomic inequality, there is an urgent need to address the issues that these oppressed groups face (Jimenez, 2009; *“Kettling” Protesters*, 2020, Menasce Horowitz et. al, 2020). Throughout the next three sections I explore the different approaches to slaughterhouse labor conditions, farmed animal protection, and domestic violence, why they might be insufficient to address these issues, and new ways to form more effective approaches with a particular emphasis on serving BIPOC and other marginalized communities.

In the next section, I outline the current framings of two main issues within the slaughterhouse: worker and farmed animal exploitation, along with the current policy approaches employed by activists based on those conceptualizations. I also present my critique of those individual framings and the segmented nature of the movements that utilize them. In the following section, I present the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence as a mechanism through which to integrate the farmed animal protection and slaughterhouse labor movement. I discuss and critique the current framings and policy approaches within domestic violence advocacy and demonstrate how those might connect with slaughterhouse activism to produce a new, conjoined, race-conscious approach to all three issues. In the final section, I

present my argument and recommendations for a new approach that integrates racial justice, animal protection, and domestic violence advocacy.

## **Overview of the Movements within the Slaughterhouse**

In this section, I detail the ways in which current scholars and activists conceptualize the injustices within the slaughterhouse and the current policy approaches used for each respective issue. First, I present the treatment of farmed animals and the work of the animal protection movement. Second, I discuss the exploitation of slaughterhouse workers and the efforts of labor advocacy groups. Finally, I conclude with a critique of the two movements in regards to their disparate advocacy and its effect on their efficacy.

### **Mainstream Animal Protection Movement**

The discussion regarding violence to farmed animals is almost exclusively had within the animal protection community by animal welfare and animal rights activists.<sup>3</sup> Animal protection organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), The Humane League, Mercy For Animals, and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) work towards ending the suffering of farmed animals. While the majority of these organizations concerned with farmed animals are part of the animal rights community, many of them employ both animal welfare and animal rights strategies to achieve their goals. Animal welfare strategies include improving the conditions of farmed animals in agricultural facilities through increasing the size of crates to which animals are confined before slaughter or improving slaughter techniques to ensure that animals are not conscious during slaughter. Animal rights strategies include the public promotion of plant-based diets and veganism or convincing large restaurant chains and food distributors to support and sell plant-based products (*Campaigns*, n.d.).<sup>4</sup>

Animal rights organizations largely frame industrial animal agriculture as problematic due to the violence and torture to farmed animals. Freeman's (2014) work *Framing Farming: Communication Strategies for Animal Rights* identifies five major farmed animal rights

organizations and uses interviews with their leaders and analyses of their work to determine the major frames the organizations employ to discuss the issues within the slaughterhouse. The dominant frames used include cruelty to animals, objectification of animals, the harm caused to human health and the environment by meat consumption and production, and the needlessness of animals for human consumption. Freeman argues that because of these organizations' emphases on animal rights and their belief that animals are "not ours to use," in order for their actions to be in line with their words, they must focus their efforts and frames around humans' moral obligations to nonhuman animals (2014, pp.194, 200). While she recommends that, for utilitarian purposes, there be attention paid to the ways in which animal agriculture negatively affects humans' health (through animal product consumption and dangerous working conditions), she views these as secondary to the violation of the rights of animals and as only to be used to help convince people to support the end of animal agriculture (Freeman, 2014, p.126). Freeman's perspective is not an anomaly within the animal rights community, but instead it is representative of many of the dominant activists' perspectives. Not only is this troubling in that it devalues the harm that animal agriculture causes to humans, but it is racial undertones due to the fact that the humans most affected by the slaughterhouse are from marginalized communities (which are already neglected groups). From the way that animal rights organizations use the harm caused to humans by animal agriculture solely as a marketing tool to the lack of discussions on race and the whiteness of the leaders, there is a blatant ignorance of the differential experiences of BIPOC in the mainstream animal rights movement. While they address a unique quality of the slaughterhouse, violence to farmed animals, their blatant ignorance of the human animals in the slaughterhouse means they trade one essential factor of addressing the industry for another.

### ***Racial Justice and Animal Rights***

There is, however, a lesser known sub-sector of the animal rights movement that acknowledges the value of including the concept of racial justice in animal activism. Two scholars in particular, Harris and Rodrigues, use their research to argue that the animal protection community overall is perceived (in my experience, accurately) as a white space that is unwelcoming to BIPOC (Harris, 2009, p.16; Rodrigues, 2020, p.72). As such, not only does it fail to address problems of race and racial disparities in the slaughterhouses, but it also discourages BIPOC from entering the conversation on violence towards farmed animals, an issue whose effects are disproportionately felt by those communities. Both Harris and Rodrigues discuss one infamous point of contention between BIPOC and the animal rights movement concerning the historical context of the comparison between human and nonhuman animal suffering. The animal protection community, particularly the animal rights community, tends to argue that the conditions of farmed animals are similar to the chattel slavery of African Americans in the U.S. or the mass murder of Jewish people during the Holocaust (Harris, 2009, p.21). Animal rights activists use this comparison to express what they believe to be the severity of the cruelty to farmed animals in the animal agriculture industry through references to horrors thought to be understood by the general public. However, in doing so, they equate the experiences of marginalized humans and nonhuman animals, a tactic historically used to degrade and oppress BIPOC in the United States (Harris, 2009, p.22). This also centers whiteness as a universal experience, failing to recognize the traumatic effect of attempting to equate humans and nonhuman animals on marginalized communities. By ignoring the potential harmful consequences and painful past (and present) acts of the animalization of BIPOC, the animal rights movement behaves as if the white experience is the only experience (Rodrigues, 2020,

p.79). As a result, this culturally-insensitive, “dreaded comparison,” turns folks’ attention away from the suffering of animals and towards the whiteness and tone-deafness of the farmed animal rights movement (Harris, 2009, p.25).

Despite an agreement on the racism within the animal rights movement, Harris and Rodrigues disagree on how the animal rights movement is to move forward from this conundrum so as to include BIPOC. Harris argues that the conversation about farmed animal protection must move from being about the status of nonhuman animals versus humans to a movement which pushes for the extension of compassion to all beings (2009, p.32). Harris argues that the human-nonhuman animal comparison is so insulting to BIPOC, not just because of the historical significance of these comparisons, but also because of the desire of oppressed groups to reinforce hierarchies that benefit them (2009, pp.29-30). Harris sees the equation of slaughterhouses to chattel slavery as threatening to Black folks who desire to be superior to animals as a way of bolstering their own status in society. By changing the narrative around animal rights and veganism to be about compassion instead of status, Harris thinks that the movement will be able to garner the support of BIPOC without having to confront this issue of hierarchies. Harris views animal rights and veganism as something about which BIPOC should be concerned simply because BIPOC strive for compassion and justice for their communities and they should want the same for all beings.

By contrast, Rodrigues argues that animal rights organizations should actively include racial justice in their movement because of the connections between animal rights and racial justice. Rodrigues claims that the white-centered animal rights movement furthers racial hierarchies and its lack of cultural sensitivity dismisses the oppression of BIPOC, particularly Black folks (Rodrigues, 2020, pp.79-80). These factors distance Black folks from the animal

rights movement and further promote white supremacy and saviorism by championing white folks as the only ones who care about animals (Rodrigues, 2020, p.82). He additionally claims that the comparison of animal agriculture to chattel slavery promotes the idea that the oppression of Black folks is a historical phenomenon and gives white vegans a pass not to critically engage with their own role in the current perpetuation of racism. Highlighting chattel slavery while failing to acknowledge mass incarceration or police brutality, contributes to the myth that racism is not still ongoing in the U.S. and diverts attention away from racial justice towards animal rights. Rodrigues presents a way to mitigate these consequences of the white-washed animal rights movement through acknowledging three main commonalities between these two movements: fighting against oppression, health disparities present in BIPOC communities due to animal products, and environmental justice concerns of animal processing facilities (Rodrigues, 2020, pp.80-81). Rodrigues suggests that the animal rights movement needs to work together with the racial justice movement through the collaborating with and amplifying the voices of BIPOC leaders in the racial justice movement, acknowledging that racial and nonhuman animal oppression should be addressed in concert with one another, and refraining from co-opting the oppression of one group to draw comparisons to other forms of oppression (namely human-nonhuman animal comparisons) (2020, p.88).

The conversation on racial justice within the animal rights movement is further complicated by Morin's work, *Carceral Space: Prisoners and Animals* (2018). Morin explores the relationship between incarcerated folks in the U.S. and farmed animals raised for slaughter through her discussion on the parallels between the "Agricultural Industrial Complex (AIC)" and the "Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)" (2018, p.32).<sup>5</sup> Morin discusses the racialization and animalization of incarcerated folks (many of whom are slaughterhouse workers) and how they



are similar to the ways in which we exploit the bodies of nonhuman animals for labor and commodities (Leduff, 2000). Despite her use of the word animalization, Morin is careful not to equate the suffering and experiences of nonhuman and human animals, as she fears that could create a situation in which forms of suffering are compared or given different values (2018, p.33).

This prudence in avoiding making value judgments regarding suffering is significant in her argument, as she critiques our society's practice of valuing some beings' suffering over others. Morin explains that in our society, we value farmed animals beneath other nonhuman animals (such as companion animals), allowing us to dismiss their suffering and use their bodies for food (2018, p.105).<sup>6</sup> She argues that because we make the distinction between different types of nonhuman animals regarding the moral and legal considerations of their suffering, the status of "animal" (meaning nonhuman animal) is not a biological descriptor, but rather a political descriptor determined by whose suffering we, as a society, value (Morin, 2018, pp.107-108). We use the term "animal" specifically when referring to those nonhuman animals whose suffering we do not consider relevant, reserving other terms for the nonhuman animals we deem valuable (e.g. dogs and cats are our "pets"). By that same logic, Morin argues that "human" is also a political term in that we do not afford all humans the same legal and moral considerations, even relegating some biological "humans" to the "animal" category (2018, p.110). She uses the status of incarcerated folks in the U.S. as an example of this designation of "animal" status to some humans. Morin examines the history of incarceration, particularly incarcerated labor, from its roots in the labor of enslaved Black peoples on the plantation to the exploitation of laborers in "chain gangs" for the construction of the early infrastructure of the country in the 1920s (2018, pp.92-93). Morin argues that incarceration is an extension of slavery using the 13th Amendment,

which maintains the legality of enslaved labor as a means of punishment (2018, p.110). Furthermore, BIPOC, Black folks in particular, are imprisoned at disproportionate rates and Blackness has become equated with criminality (Morin, 2018, pp.82, 109). In this way, Morin claims, incarcerated folks are “Blackened” and therefore, “animalized,” similarly to the way that dogs and cats can be “humanized” through some legal protections they are provided (2018, p.110). By focusing on the carceral system’s racist implications and acknowledging the ways in which racism still functions, Morin demonstrates the similarities between the oppression of humans and nonhuman animals, while also addressing one of the concerns that Rodrigues posed against animal rights’ human-nonhuman animal comparisons regarding their seeming dismissal or ignorance of current racial oppression.

Morin’s argument is similar to those made by mainstream, white-centered, animal rights organizations, however it is notably different in that Morin strives to acknowledge how different groups are made inferior through “animalization” without claiming that their experiences are the same (2018, p.82). Morin claims that it is the “carceral logic” that is responsible for the different hierarchies between races and between “human” and “animal” (2018, p.82). This concept, echoed by other scholars such as Deckha, places the root of all oppressions on our society’s willingness to use the “subhuman” category to both “other” and subordinate groups (*The Subhuman*, 2019, pp.198-199). Morin’s argument concludes with the recommendation of the abolition of carceral logic (including the carceral system and animal slaughter), as well as the adoption of a non-anthropomorphic ethical system in which animalization and hierarchies of suffering are eradicated (2018, pp.145, 147).

A similar argument for the inclusion of racial justice in the animal protection field is that animal exploitation is a tool of white supremacy. Aph Ko (2019) discusses this in *Racism as*

*Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out*. Ko uses examples in popular culture and media to demonstrate how white supremacy uses the idea of “animal” and “animalization” to consume beings (e.g. Black people and farmed animals) they deem to be “animal” and lesser than (Ko, 2019, p.124). Ko’s argument is distinctly unique in the field of animal protection and racial justice in that it provides a lens through which one can obscure the boundaries separating the two movements, as opposed to just convincing one side to care about the other. Ko argues for a multidimensional approach as opposed to an intersectional approach, which acknowledges that to attain the overarching goal of eradicating structural oppression, there are many causes that one can use as an avenue to success (Ko, 2019, p.92). In Ko’s view, “white supremacy is composed of anti-animal sentiments” and therefore the approach to both racial justice and animal protection must recognize the “zoologo-racial order” to achieve liberation for either group (Ko, 2019, p.95). This conceptualization, like Morin’s, also addresses the concerns of many BIPOC and racial justice advocates who are acutely aware of the history of the animalization of marginalized groups and, for that reason, are uncomfortable with comparing the oppression of nonhuman animals and humans. By understanding animalization itself as rooted in white supremacy, one can imagine that a fight for animal rights would mean a fight against the devaluation of nonhuman animals and would attenuate animalization’s power to demean. Hence, animal liberation would contribute to the liberation of humans, particularly BIPOC.

### **Slaughterhouse Labor Advocacy**

Labor rights are another point of advocacy in the slaughterhouse. Advocates have been fighting for improved working conditions in the slaughterhouse since the publication of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1971). Sinclair details the assembly line type work in the slaughterhouse and its treatment of workers as machines, along with the unpleasantness of the

workplace with regards to violence and exposure to dead flesh. Sinclair's analysis, meant to expose the grueling experiences of workers on the kill floor and outrage the public into an analysis of wage labor, instead led to the passage of a myriad of food safety legislation in the United States. As Sinclair explained, he "aimed at the public's heart, and by accident [he] hit it in the stomach" (*7 Things You*, n.d.). Sinclair's work brazenly critiques the life of wage workers in the slaughterhouse, desperate for work in the slaughterhouse despite unsanitary conditions, insufficient pay to feed their families, and the alcoholism to which many workers are driven due to the hardships they face thanks to the slaughterhouse. The misalignment of Sinclair's intentions and the response of the American public and government speaks to the struggles of slaughterhouse labor advocates. Though Sinclair's work is fiction, it accurately depicts the life of the wage laborer in the United States and highlights the specific experiences of the slaughterhouse laborer. Despite this clear depiction of the horrors faced by workers and Sinclair's attempt to create characters with whom the public would sympathize, readers latched on to the ways in which Sinclair's work exposed the quality of the products sold to consumers. The sanitation of the slaughterhouse became a concern, not because of the potential harm to workers, but because of the consumers' worries of the risks it posed to themselves. And those concerns were allayed by food safety legislation pushed for by the meatpacking industry to encourage consumers to recommence their purchase of meat, despite the absence of improvements to working conditions (Rouse, 2020). Though this is not to say that *The Jungle* failed to invoke a concern for labor rights in any reader, the long-lasting effects of the work surround the goods produced in the slaughterhouse, as opposed to the living beings producing the goods.

Slaughterhouse labor rights advocates' battles are further complicated by the monopolistic history of the meatpacking industry. Though meat's grasp on the American public is often equated to Americans' innate desire for animal products, the demand for industrial animal agriculture was actually manufactured over time by meatpacking companies. William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* details the transformation of the animal agriculture industry, particularly the slaughter sector, from many small butchers to the industrial consolidation which led to the domination of the market by the "Big Four" meatpackers (Cronon, 1992, p.538). Traditionally, farmers sold livestock to butchers who then slaughtered the animals at markets and sold directly to customers. Town markets were filled with different butchers all selling different livestock that they had butchered and prepared themselves. Chicago meatpacking companies streamlined this process by using factories to form "disassembly lines" of workers to slaughter animals on a large scale and then used newfound refrigeration technology and railroads to preserve the cut meat and transport it to markets (Cronon, 1992, p.511). These technologies allowed Chicago meatpackers to manipulate the temperature so that meat could be stored and shipped no matter the season, maintaining their presence in front of consumers year-round. Their bulk production gave them more product to sell and a profit margin that enabled them to sell their meat at any price the consumer would pay. By constantly saturating the market with large quantities of meat at low prices, the Chicago meatpackers were able to push smaller butchers out of the market and render their business model inviable. Arguably, the key to success for the Chicago meatpackers was the manipulation of the slaughter process from the mechanized division of labor in the "disassembly line" to the creation of technologies to engineer a constant market for their products. While the butchers could access refrigeration and transportation technology, those were costly endeavors and they

still had to pay for the livestock along with their own labor to slaughter and prepare the animal for market. The meatpackers, however, relied on repetitive, seemingly unskilled jobs, giving them the freedom to keep the prices of their meat down and therefore force the butchers to lower their prices as well in order to compete. As the butchers' costs of production were significantly higher, they ultimately had to assimilate to the business model of the meatpackers to remain profitable.

This artificially crafted demand for animal products reinforces the monopolization of the slaughter industry and inhibits labor advocacy today. The control of the market by the "Big Four," though it is a different "Big Four" than in the 1880s, still persists with companies such as Tyson, JBS, Cargill, and Sysco (*Leading meat*, 2020). And the power they hold in the economy correlates to their social and political power as well. In addition to the agreements they have with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), the United States immigration authority, giving slaughterhouses immunity for hiring undocumented workers as long as they allow I.C.E. to conduct regular deportation raids and the partnerships they have with carceral facilities to employ incarcerated folks as part of rehabilitation programs, they also have agreements with the U.S. government's welfare system, acting as official partners for the programs. In order to receive welfare benefits in the U.S., such as food stamps, one must be employed or actively seeking employment and become employed after a limited period of time (Cook, 2004, pp.212-213). If one is unsuccessful in finding employment, which is not uncommon given the racism present in U.S. hiring practices and the lack of resources low-income folks have to find employment, the government deems one ineligible to receive welfare benefits. However, agreements with employers, such as Tyson, give welfare beneficiaries without employment the choice to be employed by Tyson at a slaughterhouse facility instead of losing their benefits.

Through this agreement, these large corporations gain employees who are desperate to work and who rely on the position to receive the government assistance they need to afford basic resources, such as food. This functions as class-based exploitation, as workers dependent on this employment for food are reluctant to report any wrongdoing by the corporations or maltreatment for fear of retaliation and termination.

I would be remiss not to touch on the theory of racial capitalism and its potential connections to these injustices. Racial capitalism is a term presented by Cedric J. Robinson in his work *Black Marxism* (2019, pp.9-10). Robinson explains that capitalism, an intentionally crafted economic system based on private property and wage labor, has its roots in the European feudal system and the racialization of certain groups. Though many economists and political scientists today, especially in the United States, accept capitalism as the current phase in the evolution of market systems, Robinson questions that idea and presents an alternative theory that capitalism is not part of a natural progression, but instead is a system hand-selected by those in power to guarantee they maintain power. Additionally, he argues that the capitalist system, as evidenced in part by its history of and reliance upon slave labor, requires the racialization of and subsequent racism towards groups of people (Robinson, 2021, pp.26-27). Industrial animal agriculture functions by a system of wage labor in which BIPOC (racialized individuals) are exploited by mega corporations and it exists within the framework of the U.S.' capitalist system. Hence, it is helpful to acknowledge this way of understanding the development of capitalism given the emphasis on profit-maximization and racialization within the slaughterhouse.

The theory of racial capitalism is exemplified in analyzing unionization efforts within the slaughterhouse as evidenced by Nancy Neiman's (2020) work, *U.S. Meatpacking and Racist Ideology*, which describes how meatpacking unions were specifically targeted by large

meatpacking corporations beginning in the 1950s. Unions are a critical organizing and accountability tool for manufacturing workers and slaughterhouses greatly diminished the labor unions' power and their ability to unionize. Though meatpacking has its roots in the urban scene of Chicago, corporations have strategically sited their slaughterhouse facilities in rural areas that have "right to work" laws to minimize workers' participation in unions. They also specifically recruit immigrant workers who, due to their often vulnerable status in the U.S., are not likely to join labor unions (Neiman, 2020, p.37). "Divide and conquer" management strategies also play a role in blocking unions. Management will create and use racial divides among workers to foster conflict and competition between them, thus making them less likely to organize (Neiman, 2020 p.43). These large corporations also manipulate the labor market to discourage unions. The "Big Four" commonly take actions to eliminate their smaller competitors, leaving the workers of those smaller slaughterhouses without employment. Members of the "Big Four" will then offer to hire those workers themselves, but will make decisions about employment based on workers' union involvement. Because these workers are often heavily reliant upon those jobs, this is an effective method of discouraging unionization (Neiman, 2020, p.41). By preventing the formation of unions within slaughterhouses, these corporations can keep their wages low and shirk their responsibility to provide workers with certain benefits and rights (Neiman, 2020, p.40). Through the lens of racial capitalism, this "union-breaking" is a clear way to increase profit by targeting racialized groups with distinct vulnerability due to their racialization (Neiman, 2020, p.41). They can reduce slaughterhouse workers to mere racialized costs of production to be factored into profit margins, as opposed to living beings with needs who deserve basic rights.

Slaughterhouse labor advocacy organizations are one way the movement has worked around the union-breaking practices of the meatpacking industry to fight for better labor rights.



These organizations are concerned with slaughterhouse conditions for workers and pay particular attention to the needs of BIPOC. Groups such as HEAL Food Alliance and the Food Chain Workers' Alliance (FCWA) both represent the interests of agricultural workers, who are largely BIPOC, immigrants, low-income, and/or incarcerated (*Platform*, n.d.; *Vision*, n.d.).

Acknowledging the brutal working conditions for slaughterhouse laborers, HEAL and FCWA are among many organizations fighting for the end of factory farming and for the re-envisioning of animal agriculture to improve the welfare of workers, animals, and the environment. Unlike the animal rights movement, they do not call for the end of animal agriculture altogether, but for an improvement in the welfare of farmed animals. Their priority is not to end violence against farmed animals, but to advocate for policies that would mitigate the particularly vulnerable status of marginalized workers and improve their working conditions, which also happens to include making the slaughter process more humane for farmed animals. The regulation of slaughterhouse line speeds, more training for workers on how to operate dangerous machinery to mitigate injury and slaughter animals more quickly and painlessly, pasture-raised animals, a pathway to citizenship for immigrant workers, penalties for corporations engaging in the maltreatment of laborers, reduction in the usage of antibiotics on farmed animals, higher wages, and guaranteed access to healthcare are all policies adopted by labor advocacy organizations. However, despite labor advocates' race-conscious, systemic approach to the conditions within the slaughterhouse, they fail to address the violence towards farmed animals and thus remain at odds with the farmed animal protection movement.

### **Critique of the Divisions Between Slaughterhouse Labor and Animal Rights**

The slaughterhouse is the site of rampant exploitation and violence. Workers are used as mechanisms of murder and meatpacking corporations capitalize on their vulnerabilities. Swaths

of farmed animals are confined to small spaces to be slaughtered and processed for consumption. Labor advocates and animal rights activists both champion the improvement of slaughterhouse conditions overall in the public and political spheres, but the two function as independent movements with their own distinct goals. While there are differences between the objectives of the two movements, they exist in the same context and they aid in contextualizing one another. It is inappropriate to separate the two completely as they do not function independently of each other, but instead they are compounding and interconnected. In practice, the insularity of the movements hinders the progress of them both. In lieu of directing their collective efforts towards the deconstruction of this site of suffering, they compete against one another and distance themselves from potential allies.

Slaughterhouse labor advocacy organizations are sometimes even in direct conflict with farmed animal welfare advocates, because of perceived competing interests. One prominent form of activism by animal advocates is the exposure of undercover videos from slaughterhouses, often depicting wanton cruelty to farmed animals by workers during the slaughter process. Animal protection organizations use these videos to garner public support against the slaughterhouse and the workers themselves. These organizations also often attempt to arrest and prosecute workers for their violence against animals (*Update*, 2013). While the actions recorded by undercover investigators tend to be quite disturbing, even to those in the general public who eat meat, blaming and pressing criminal charges against the workers individually absolves the corporations of any responsibility in the matter. This also highlights the animal protection movement's reliance on law enforcement to hold individuals accountable for animal abuse, a dependence that puts the movement at odds with many BIPOC who consistently have their lives threatened by the criminal legal system (*Law enforcement*, 2020). Moreover this can be

alienating for folks involved in advocating for slaughterhouse laborers because of their recognition of laborers not as perpetrators, but as victims at the hands of these giant corporations within the larger system of industrial animal agriculture.

The mainstream animal rights community, the predominant voice for farmed animals, addresses some key aspects of the slaughterhouse well, yet alienates anyone concerned with racial justice, including BIPOC themselves, through its single-issue activism. By framing engagement with the animal agriculture industry, through employment or consumption, as an individual's conscious, immoral choice, it ignores the systems that are actually inhibiting individuals' autonomy in the matter. It is possible to argue that there are some individuals in the U.S. who independently make the choice to work in industrial slaughterhouses. However, a majority of workers in the slaughterhouse hold a vulnerable status which forces them into employment at the slaughterhouse (incarcerated, undocumented immigrants, welfare recipients, BIPOC unable to find other work, etc.). It is also possible to argue that there are some individuals in the U.S. who independently make the choice to eat food from industrial slaughterhouses. However, the existence of the food apartheid in many BIPOC communities, as well as the overwhelming control of the market by giant, industrial corporations such as Tyson and JBS, make it close to impossible for most consumers to have a true choice in the type of meat they consume or in whether or not they are able to refrain from eating meat due to limited accessibility to certain foods (*Food Apartheid*, 2020). So while framing these actions as immoral choices might be an accurate representation for a handful of Americans, if the animal rights community's goal is to eradicate the suffering of all animals, this framing is highly selective in its appeal and its narrowness hinders the achievement of that goal.

## **Conclusion**

The slaughterhouse is a source of concern for both labor advocates and animal rights advocates. Both movements struggle to dismantle aspects of the Agricultural Industrial Complex and diminish its power to inflict suffering upon vulnerable humans and nonhuman animals within the slaughterhouse. However, the two struggles are often at odds with one another, largely due to conflicts surrounding race and structural power. Each movement's insularity escalates its tension with the other movement and bolsters the meatpacking industry. I argue that it is this disjointed activism that explains why the current policy approaches fail. In the next section, I present the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence as a way to bring these two facets of the slaughterhouse together and craft more effective policy approaches.

## **The Link Between Slaughterhouses and Domestic Violence**

Given the history and the tension between the animal rights and slaughterhouse labor advocacy movements, there is a need for a new approach to bring the two causes together and I posit that domestic violence can achieve this. There is a quantitative link between communities with slaughterhouses and increased rates of domestic violence. Throughout this section I discuss the potential explanations for the link with an emphasis on workers' exposure to violence towards animals as key to understanding this link. I also present scholarship and activism surrounding the better-known link between violence to companion animals and domestic violence. Then, I use ethnographic accounts from slaughterhouse workers to make a case for why violence to farmed animals should be understood in similar ways as violence to companion animals. Finally, I argue for a new conceptualization of animal rights and labor advocacy through the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence.

### **Overview of the Link Between Slaughterhouses and Domestic Violence**

Analyzing national crime data from the early 21st century, Fitzgerald et. al and Jacques show that arrest rates for violent crimes (including family violence, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence) greatly increase in communities in which slaughterhouses are sited (Fitzgerald et. al, 2009, p.158; Jacques, 2015, p.594). In addition, both works discuss the potential reasons for this link. Fitzgerald et. al identify four potential explanations for slaughterhouses' contribution to domestic violence: unemployment, social disorganization, demographics, and exposure to violence towards animals (2009, pp.161-162). They find that the link is only present in slaughterhouse communities (as opposed to communities with other manufacturing industries) which leads them to conclude that, while the former three explanations may influence the link, violence towards animals (a quality unique to the slaughterhouse

environment) is a key contributor to the link and the most salient explanation to the link not being present in communities with other types of manufacturing industries (Fitzgerald et.al, 2009, p.175). As such, I identify exposure to violence towards animals as an essential quality in understanding this link.

Jacques, building upon the work of Fitzgerald et. al, seeks to specifically address the potential explanation of social disorganization theory for the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence (2015, p.595). Jacques' hypothesis is that when controlling for outside social factors, ethnic heterogeneity in a community, unemployment, etc., the slaughterhouse still contributes to increased rates of crime and family violence. Her hypothesis builds upon the work of Fitzgerald et. al (2009), which dispels many of the myths of slaughterhouse communities (e.g. slaughterhouse workers actually tend to be individuals with families to support, as opposed to young, single males who are believed to be prone to violence) (p.161). Jacques concludes that her hypothesis is correct, suggesting that the slaughterhouse exposing workers to violence towards animals does contribute to an increased propensity for violence towards women and children (2015, pp.599, 609). The link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence is a complex, multi-tiered issue that can be understood as the intersection of multiple, linked factors. Despite the emphasis placed on violence towards animals in the context of understanding the specific link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, I think it is helpful to expound upon the other potential explanations for the link, as they still contribute to the domestic violence perpetrated in these communities.

Patriarchy and misogyny are common explanations for domestic violence and they are exacerbated within the slaughterhouse. Masculinity is not inherently malicious, but when exaggerated in our patriarchal society, it can become toxic. This form of masculinity values

“toughness” and “strength” and punishes emotions and vulnerability (McLoughlin, 2018, p.325). This masculinity also assumes that anyone who identifies as “man” must exhibit these traits and anyone who identifies as “woman” must lack these traits. As such, toxic masculinity teaches men to repress all emotions besides those deemed “masculine” (e.g. anger) and teaches anyone who is not a man to excuse and accept this behavior as inherently masculine. However, despite this repression, the feelings men have often do not just disappear, and with limited, societally appropriate ways to express themselves, men can resort to anger as an expression of these other emotions. One way to understand domestic violence is as a result of this valuing of manliness and devaluation of femininity, where physical and verbal violence are used as coping mechanisms for handling one’s emotions while still feeling “strong” (Holliday et. al, 2018, p.107). If one is taught not to express their emotions of sadness or depression and taught only to show anger, then one’s response to any emotion other than anger will be frustration and, consequently violence.

It is important to note that the harmful effects of the adoption of the systems and ideals of patriarchy and toxic masculinity are not limited to men. Largely, the conversation on domestic violence works centers around men abusing women, however survivors can have any gender identity. Though the large majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men and is thought to have roots in patriarchy, this framing of the issue operates within the gender binary (excluding the wide range of genders, in addition to men and women, affected by domestic violence) and minimizes the experiences that men have as survivors of domestic violence. Despite many of my sources operating under these assumptions and within these contexts, the conclusions and ideas that I form in this research do not require a reliance on the gender binary and instead look to address domestic violence as it relates to people of all genders.

Industrial manufacturing work, including slaughterhouse labor, is commonly associated with masculinity. These industries, referred to as “dirty work,” involve manual labor and require brute force and strength, all things considered to be masculine (Slutskaya et. al, 2016). Slaughterhouse labor also requires violence, along with stoicism and a compartmentalization of emotions. In Carol J. Adams’ work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams draws parallels between the concept of meat-eating and patriarchy (Adams, 2016). In particular, she explains how the commodification of farmed animals for slaughter mirrors the way that women are commodified for consumption by a patriarchal society. Adams even describes the slaughterhouse’s treatment of both animals and workers as “inert, unthinking, unfeeling objects” as comparable to the way one is treated during a rape (Adams, 2016, p.34-35). This conceptualization of the slaughterhouse as a reinforcement of misogynistic values demonstrates the prioritization of masculinity within the slaughterhouse.

However, it is not only men who work in the slaughterhouse. Women actually make up approximately 42 percent of workers within the slaughterhouse. (Fremstad et. al, 2020). Nonetheless, the slaughterhouse fosters a culture of patriarchy and perpetuation of toxic masculinity for workers of all genders within the slaughterhouse (McLoughlin, 2018, p.325). However, these traditionally masculine traits needed for slaughter are in conflict with the exploitation that takes place within the slaughterhouse (Slutskaya, 2016, p.169). The same workers who are trained to exhibit masculinity are also required to be subordinate to their superiors on the kill floor. Laborers are forced to work in unsafe conditions, on high-paced slaughter lines, and without access to basic needs such as the bathroom or proper safety training. And for BIPOC workers, not only is there a power differential between superiors and inferiors, but there is a hierarchy of workers and supervisors based on race and/or immigration status



(LeDuff, 2000). This creates a dissonance in the slaughterhouse between the bias towards masculinity and the degradation of workers, particularly for BIPOC workers. Workers are to both exhibit strength and superiority towards farmed animals, while concurrently facing degradation from their superiors. This dissonance could explain the increased rates of domestic violence within workers in the field of “dirty work,” as the emphasis on demonstrations of masculinity within the workplace could lead to extra-institutional violence (Jacques, 2015). Workers are expected to exhibit masculine traits due to societal and workplace pressures, but then are subjugated in the workplace and rendered relatively powerless, leading them to overcompensate to assert their power outside of the workplace in the form of physical domination of one’s family members or intimate partners.

In addition to the specific qualities of the slaughterhouse that contribute to the reinforcement of toxic masculinity, there is the system of wage labor in which the slaughterhouse functions that is also rooted in patriarchy. Silvia Federici’s work, *Wages Against Housework*, outlines the ways that wage labor, a system in which workers labor in exchange for money, perpetuates patriarchy through its selective valuing of certain forms of labor. Most notably, housework, historically deemed women’s work, is not considered part of the wage labor system. Women are expected to maintain a household by cooking, cleaning, raising children, and tending to the needs of her partner (assumed to be a man). Despite being time-consuming and labor-intensive, none of these responsibilities are compensated monetarily, as they are part of society’s expectations for women. Furthermore, women are socialized to desire these responsibilities in order to attain true womanhood, further cementing the idea for society and for women themselves that housework is a natural part of being a woman as opposed to actual labor deserving of wage compensation. Federici explains how not only does this force women to

financially depend on men, but it also burdens men with the responsibility of being the sole financial provider for women and children. This intensifies the stress and pressure for men to obtain substantial wages, a seemingly insurmountable feat in industries like the slaughterhouse in which workers' wages are steadily declining (Neiman, 2020, p.40). This strain on workers to earn wages that are largely not attainable hinders their capacity to meet society's expectations for the responsibilities of men, while at the same time reinforcing the patriarchal system of wage labor from which those expectations stem.

Social disorganization theory is another potential explanation for the augmented rates of domestic violence in communities with slaughterhouses. Social disorganization theory posits that a community without strong social ties will have more violent crime (Jacques, 2015, p.595). Therefore, socially disorganized communities are communities with ethnic and racial diversity, immigrants, low-income, high rates of unemployment, and the presence of young, single males. This theory relies on an understanding of violence as a result of a lack of institutions, systems of support, or sense of togetherness in a community. Individuals who do not feel a responsibility or connection to their fellow community members will be more likely to commit violence (against neighbors or their own families) without fear of social repercussion. This theory also assumes that certain demographics do not form community bonds in the same way as others. For example, that communities with diverse ethnic and racial identities or with heavy immigrant populations will not have as strong community ties as communities with homogenous, U.S. born members. While language barriers might, in fact, be an obstacle to socialization in some immigrant communities, these assumptions have racist undertones. There are many close-knit communities that include people of varying backgrounds and nationalities. Moreover, slaughterhouse towns, which are largely rural and are full of immigrants and BIPOC workers, are

able to form strong community connections (Striffler, 2004, p.126). This is in spite of language barriers, ethnic and racial heterogeneity, and the time commitment of slaughterhouse work allowing for only minimal socialization with others outside of one's home. Social disorganization theory also assumes that young, single males are more likely to commit violent crime due to a lack of roots in the community. This might also, however, be explained by toxic masculinity and the societal pressure for young men to display strength. Additionally, Fitzgerald et. al (2009) explain in their work that slaughterhouse communities actually tend to be filled with working families, not young, single males, furthering disproving social disorganization theory's role in the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence.

Despite these quantitative analyses and discussion of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, the narrative surrounding domestic violence prevention and response lacks a legitimate consideration of this link. Fitzgerald et. al and Jacques, themselves, only begin to address the implications of violence towards animals for policy approaches to the link and they do not address the disproportionate effects of this link on marginalized communities. Instead, the mainstream understanding of domestic violence is that it is an issue of criminality or men enthralled by the patriarchy, leading to a heavy reliance on the carceral system to resolve instances of domestic abuse and prevent future acts of violence (Durfee & Goodmark, 2019, p.473).

### **Current Approaches to Domestic Violence**

The historical explanation of this individualistic framing of domestic violence can be understood through Gruber (2020) in her work, *The Feminist War on Crime*, in which she highlights three competing branches of the second-wave feminist movement (anti-patriarchy, anti-poverty, and legal feminists), each with their own view on the causes of and approaches to

domestic violence (p.45). She details the way that the prevailing branch was the one that pushed for the current dominant policy approach to domestic violence, greater involvement of law enforcement and the criminal legal system. This branch was largely made of white, “legal feminists,” who believed that the criminal legal system was the most effective way to prevent and respond to domestic violence. Policies such as mandatory arrests and mandatory prosecution were instituted in the late 1980s and required that police officers arrest abusers and that prosecutors charge them with domestic violence, regardless of the circumstances or hesitations of the survivor (Gruber, 2020, p.44). These policies were intended to ensure that abusers were held accountable for their actions and that they were unable to intimidate a survivor into dropping charges, however these intentions have not always been in line with the actual consequences of these policies.

The carceral approach frames domestic violence as an individualized issue: a bad man hurts a woman and must be locked away so that he does not commit the same act again. In this understanding of domestic violence, the woman in this scenario is what Gruber refers to as “everywoman,” a woman with a “universal” experience of being white and middle-class (2020, p.56). The carceral approach was supported and popularized by the feminist movement and survivors of domestic violence, but its centering of largely white voices and experiences resulted in its inability to serve all survivors in the same way. Gruber demonstrates this by presenting BIPOC feminists’ explanations of the social and economic factors that contribute to domestic violence (2020, p.52). One young, Latina woman explains how her alcoholic stepfather murdered her mother due to the “racism and socioeconomic precarity” he experienced while working a manufacturing job (Gruber, 2020, p.54). Gruber presents the woman’s argument that “white supremacy...caused minority men to engage in [violence] against women.” Gruber further

supports this argument by claiming that arrests for domestic violence seem to reduce incidences of violence against white women, but actually provoke violence against Black women, demonstrating that the carceral system functions primarily for the benefit of the white “everywoman” at the expense and exclusion of non-white survivors (2020, p.58). Furthermore, incarceration is not an effective tool for protecting survivors of domestic violence regardless of race, as approximately 40 percent of domestic violence offenders are rearrested for another domestic violence offense in the first two years after release (Durfee & Goodmark, 2019, p.473; Nguyen & Bird, 2018). The reliance on carceral methods of addressing domestic violence also directs more funding towards law enforcement and away from systems of support for survivors, such as access to mental health or family shelter services, decreasing the safety of survivors (Gruber, 2020, p.60).

Discrimination within the policing and justice system is not new to the BIPOC community and, in fact, their cognizance of this leads to their hesitancy to engage with the formal legal system, further lessening the effectiveness of this approach to domestic violence. Belknap and Grant (2021) discuss the present consequences of this in their work, *Domestic Violence Policy: A World of Change*, as well as the history of the policing system in the United States and the existence of two justice systems: one for white people and another for non-white people. Belknap and Grant describe the criminal legal system as a remnant of colonialism and refer to U.S. law enforcement as a colonial policing system (2021, pp.5-6). They argue that the current system of policing in the U.S. is an attempt to further the goals of colonialism and white supremacy by criminalizing marginalized communities, particularly Black people, through mass incarceration and racial profiling (*Mass Incarceration*, 2021). The criminal legal system in the U.S. exists in the context of white supremacy and a capitalist economic system that prioritizes

profit-maximization above people. Moreover, it is buttressed by both of these systems, as demonstrated by the Prison Industrial Complex. Carceral facilities are increasingly privatized and incarceration has become a lucrative, for-profit enterprise, profiting especially off of the criminalization of Black and brown bodies (*Private Prisons*, 2021). Under the guise of criminal rehabilitation and public safety, the government structured criminal justice legislation to facilitate the mass incarceration of marginalized groups and to use those incarcerated individuals as a disposable and manipulable labor force (Shemkus, 2015). Many members of the carceral population must engage in rehabilitative work programs meant to aid in their reintegration and return to society and the economy (*Doing Time in Slaughterhouses*, 2019). The idea is that working a job while incarcerated will give those folks the skills to acquire employment once they are released from prison and that it will foster a sense of responsibility in individuals who are understood to have previously made the irresponsible choice to commit a crime. Industries, such as the Agricultural Industrial Complex and slaughterhouses contract with carceral facilities to recruit incarcerated workers. Incarcerated individuals are assigned to certain positions without the agency that other workers might have in regards to where they work or the ability to advocate for adequate wages and treatment. Due to their criminal status, incarcerated individuals are subject to abysmally low pay and egregious labor conditions, resulting in corporations profiting off of the diminished social standing of criminalized BIPOC.

Unsurprisingly, it is not only the Black community that has a complicated and tumultuous relationship with law enforcement in the United States. Immigrants in the U.S. face significant scrutiny when engaging with the justice system. The anti-immigrant rhetoric that has amplified in recent years targets individuals from other countries as outsiders and questions their presence in this country (Belknap & Grant, 2021, pp.6-7). Moreover, undocumented immigrants, who

work disproportionately in slaughterhouses, face an even greater risk of violence and aggression from law enforcement, as they are subject to deportation, separation from their families, and detainment. These consequences can act as deterrents for immigrants who are survivors of domestic violence to seek help from the justice system, forcing them to choose between safety from their abuser and forcible removal from the country in which they have built their life.

There is also hesitancy from survivors to engage with the criminal legal system because of the ways in which survivors have been criminalized (Gilfus, 2002). Victim-blaming and punishing survivors for committing violence in self-defense (particularly survivors of color who are already perceived as aggressive or combative due to white supremacy) has led to the incarceration of many survivors who were seeking help from law enforcement. Also, many survivors use illegal drugs and substances as coping mechanisms for the abuse and risk arrest and prosecution if they are to report the violence to police. Another complication with using the carceral system as a form of justice and prevention for domestic violence is the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual violence within carceral facilities and among law enforcement officers. A dependence on the police to protect survivors leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by those officers (*Words from Prison: Sexual*, 2021). Despite the fact that individuals accuse hundreds of police officers and prison guards of physical and sexual abuse every year, only a fraction of law enforcement officers are ever investigated (*Words from Prison - Did*, 2021). This makes possible the re-victimization of survivors who are criminalized and also allows incarcerated perpetrators to be exposed to domestic violence in a setting in which it is tolerated and accepted.

Belknap and Grant use their argument to propose alternative policy solutions to domestic violence based on racial justice. Their recommendations include survivor-centered responses that

acknowledge the unique needs, intersecting identities, and experiences of survivors of abuse and abusers, while also working against the criminal legal system and colonial policing practices in the U.S. (Belknap & Grant, 2021, p.7). There are domestic violence organizations that subscribe to the ideology of Belknap and Grant and who believe that the response to domestic violence must be sensitive to the societal context in which the violence occurs. Organizations such as the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) and the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (CPEDV) prioritize policies that address the social and economic factors that lead to domestic violence, as opposed to treating it as an issue of individuals' bad choices. These organizations identify other contributors to domestic violence (such as the ones referred to by Jacques and Fitzgerald et. al in their works) like patriarchy, economic distress, and untreated mental illness (*Legislative*, n.d.; *Policy*, n.d.). Acknowledging that BIPOC and immigrants have unique experiences within the U.S. economic and legal system, they push for economic justice, access to housing, and resources for survivors outside of the criminal legal system. These organizations function on the assumption that domestic violence is an action that people take when their other needs are not met, such as housing, livable wages, mental health resources, etc. As such, they work to change the conditions in which people are living to prevent occurrences of domestic violence and to prioritize the care of survivors in situations in which violence does occur.

### **Link Between Violence to Animals and Violence to Humans**

Linking slaughterhouses and domestic violence has the potential to both unite the movements within the slaughterhouse and improve the policy approaches of domestic violence advocacy groups. Though the aforementioned organizations do attempt to address domestic violence systemically and pay particular care to the needs of marginalized groups, they do not



acknowledge the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence and therefore neglect a factor in the prevalence of domestic violence, violence towards animals. This omission weakens their strategy and enables the link to persist. Next, I explore in depth the link between violence to animals and violence to humans to better understand how these three movements might unite.

### ***Violence to Companion Animals and Violence to Humans***

An integral part to understanding the unique link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence is understanding the experiences specific to the slaughterhouse, namely, the effects of exposure to violence towards animals. However, this aspect of the slaughterhouse has been largely overlooked. Despite a lack of robust academic discussion on the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, the literature on the link between violence towards nonhuman companion animals and violence to humans is rich. As meat-eating and the existence of slaughterhouses are both widely accepted in the mainstream American culture, animal slaughter for human consumption is not generally considered to be a form of violence but, instead, a necessary task that, while not pleasant, is not immoral. However, this is not the case for the killing of or use of physical violence against all nonhuman animals. Companion animals (dogs, cats, horses, etc.) have a special place in our society and though they may not share legal status with humans (even companion animals are considered legal property in most states), they are often included in folks' conceptions of family. It is commonly agreed upon that torturing cats, dog fighting, or killing bunnies is not an acceptable form of behavior in our society. In fact, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a handbook used as the authority for psychiatric diagnoses according to the American Psychiatric Association, names violence to nonhuman animals as one of the symptoms of a conduct disorder (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2013). And, in recent history, many of the individuals responsible for mass shootings

throughout the United States have histories of torturing animals such as dogs, cats, and squirrels (Arluke, 2018). In *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse : Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention*, Ascione and Arkow (1999) discuss the history of this link, examples of it throughout our society, and recommendations for addressing it. They discuss in depth how individuals exhibit violence towards companion animals prior to committing acts of violence against humans, such as family members or intimate partners. Abusers also often use violence towards companion animals to threaten domestic violence survivors or to force them to stay in unsafe situations (Ascione & Arkow, 1999, p.54).

And, in addition to scholarly work on the link between violence to companion animals and violence to humans, the concept is also widely accepted by institutions in the United States. The National Link Coalition, a nation-wide organization with chapters in states across the country, is dedicated to studying and exposing the link between domestic violence, companion animal abuse, elder abuse, and child abuse in an attempt to break the cycle of violence (What is the Link, n.d.). Though these links have been studied and well-established, the legal status of animals as property in our society means that, in practice, this link is not always acknowledged. Domestic violence shelters are not required to allow survivors to bring their pets into the facility, forcing survivors to pick between their own safety and the safety of their beloved companion, of which they often choose the latter (Ponsi, 2017). Within the criminal legal system (which as explained above is the dominant means of handling cases of domestic violence), many survivors use protective orders as a way to ensure their safety. However, these protective orders do not always include the protection of their family pet, which is often a source of comfort and support for the survivor through the abuse, as well as a general companion to the family (*Including Pets*, n.d.). And, even when the statute allows for animals to be protected within these orders,

prosecutors do not always explain this to the survivor, as animals are not prioritized within the mainstream domestic violence advocacy sphere. Additionally, because animals are not seen as legal individuals in many states, the penalties for animal cruelty are relatively light. They can range from a few months of community service to a few years in prison, even for the torture or murder of a nonhuman animal. The National Link Coalition looks to increase these penalties for acts of violence against nonhuman animals to deter all forms of violence by punishing and incarcerating individuals that commit animal cruelty before they perpetrate violence against humans. These are just a few examples of the gaps that The National Link Coalition identifies that could be filled by acknowledging the link between violence to nonhuman animals and violence to humans. The National Link Coalition believes that knowing that the two forms of violence (to humans and to nonhuman animals) can lead to each other, the coalition can better prepare law enforcement agencies and advocacy groups to identify each form of abuse in its early stages so as to prevent the other, linked forms of abuse.

### ***Violence to Farmed Animals and Violence to Humans***

In contrast to the widespread acceptance of the link between violence to companion animals and violence to humans, the link between the violence to animals within the slaughterhouse and violence to humans is a niche topic, discussed by a small handful of scholars and activists. While torturing or killing dogs is seen as socially and morally deviant, the torturing and killing of chickens in the slaughterhouse is, while largely hidden from society, understood as a normal and accepted part of life. Ascione and Arkow discuss this exclusion of farmed animals in their discussion on the psychological effects of killing animals. While neglecting welfare standards for farmed animals, such as starving a cow, is legally and socially considered animal cruelty, the slaughter of animals for food is viewed as a necessary action that is gruesome, but

not the type of wanton violence that constitutes animal cruelty and, therefore, not considered capable of leading to human abuse (Ascione & Arkow, 1999, p.232). Ascione and Arkow delineate the actions of slaughterhouse workers from acts of animal cruelty by the workers' intentions. Because the intentions of slaughterhouse workers are explained as motivated by a desire to have employment, as opposed to a desire to kill animals, and their actions are in line with society's expectations, Ascione and Arkow qualify their actions as abuse, but not cruelty, and therefore do not signal a propensity for violence towards humans (1999, p.332).

In contrast with Ascione and Arkow, Dillard (2008) addresses the psychological effects of killing farmed animals on slaughterhouse workers in her work, *A Slaughterhouse Nightmare: Psychological Harm Suffered by Slaughterhouse Employees and the Possibility of Redress through Legal Reform*. Dillard presents anecdotal evidence of slaughterhouse workers displaying a disregard for animal life beyond the requirements of their jobs, such as workers "tossing around dying birds 'just for fun'" (2008, p.396). Dillard also describes Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS) as a potential mental illness suffered by slaughterhouse workers. PITS is a psychological phenomenon caused by cognitive dissonance (referred to as "doubling") in which slaughterhouse workers both believe violence to animals is wrong, while simultaneously having to desensitize themselves to violence to slaughter farmed animals (Dillard, 2008, p.398). This doubling, Dillard claims, is shared with other perpetrators of violence, such as Nazis who knew murder was wrong but still participated in the mass murder of Jewish people. Dillard also discusses the need for slaughterhouse workers to have lower thresholds for empathy, as it is impractical for them to both kill on such a large scale and feel compassion for each of the animals (2008, p.399). She takes this a step further to claim that this lower capacity for empathy

might lead to increased rates of domestic violence, citing Fitzgerald et. al's quantitative analysis (Dillard, 2008, p.400).

Dillard's claim is supported by the ethnographic work of Eisnitz (1997) in *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry*, also cited by Dillard. Eisnitz's work is a collection of accounts from slaughterhouse workers about working conditions and life in slaughterhouse communities. One worker explains how on the kill floor he had to quickly transition from seeing pigs nuzzle him "like a puppy" to "beat[ing] them to death with a pipe" (Eisnitz, 1997, p.87). The emotional toll that this cognitive dissonance took on the worker caused him to begin to view people in the same way and to turn to alcohol to cope (Eisnitz, 1997, pp.87-88). Another worker describes that he felt he was in a "combat zone" on the kill floor (Eisnitz, 1997, p.91). One of the dangers of slaughterhouse work is that the animals are not always fully unconscious before they get to the kill floor. If not properly stunned before slaughter, animals will flail and can cause injury to workers while they try to use sharp machinery to slaughter the animals (Eisnitz, 1997, p.90). This worker's fear of being injured by the sharp machinery and animals desperately trying to escape slaughter contributed to him feeling as though he had to defend himself against the animals. He describes how he would "stick a hog" by using a dagger to remove its eye to make it suffer for flailing and causing him injury (Eisnitz, 1997, p.91). He goes further to explain how he would make hogs "drown in [their] own blood," "split [their] nose," and "[grind] salt brine into" their open wounds (Eisnitz, 1997, p.93). The worker acknowledged that these actions were not something to be proud of, but a direct result of his frustration due to his working conditions and desensitization to violence from the slaughterhouse. He, too, claimed that these violent feelings and frustrations extended beyond the farmed animals and made him feel as though he "could've

taken a human life and not given it one thought or had one regret for it” (Eisnitz, 1997, p.93).

These discussions on the connection between violence to animals and violence to humans contribute to an understanding of the conditions of the slaughterhouse that lead to domestic violence.

Crucial to the discussion on the psychological and emotional trauma suffered by workers in the slaughterhouse due to exposure to animal violence is the racial and class hierarchies present within the workplace. As has been discussed throughout my work, slaughterhouse laborers are predominantly BIPOC, immigrants, low-income, and/or incarcerated. This creates multiple avenues through which these laborers can be exploited. Firsthand accounts of experiences within the workplace document a tense work environment exaggerated by the differing positionalities and identities held by workers and management. In LeDuff’s account of a slaughterhouse in his 2000 article, *At A Slaughterhouse Some Things Never Die*, he describes the way the individuals who are appointed to management positions are largely white and that there is a racial hierarchy in line assignments with white folks at the top followed by Indigenous folks, with Black folks, immigrants, and incarcerated folks at the bottom (LeDuff, 2000). During his time at the slaughterhouse he witnessed workers grouping together by race and identifying workers of other races as enemies in the workplace (Neiman, 2020, p.48). White managers would threaten to replace immigrants with Black folks and vice versa, exaggerating these arbitrary divisions even more through tangible penalties and rewards. This method of “divide and conquer,” whether a cognizant choice by management or not, heightened the stressfulness of the job by thwarting any attempts at establishing solidarity between workers.

Another layer to this hierarchy is the legal status of many workers in the slaughterhouse. Prisons often use labor as a form of rehabilitation for incarcerated folks and slaughterhouses are

a popular employment contractor for these programs (*Doing Time in Slaughterhouses*, 2019). Incarcerated people, as wards of the state, have little to no choice in their employment assignments and refusal to participate in these rehabilitation programs can delay their release. Incarcerated workers are paid well below minimum wage, again due to their status as wards of the state, and have little agency to speak up about poor or hazardous working conditions as they are at the mercy of the prison guards. Another extremely vulnerable group with little voice or autonomy in the slaughterhouse are immigrants. Slaughterhouses are heavily advertised to undocumented immigrants attempting to flee their home countries by smugglers who promise them well-paying jobs and a safe place to live (Cook, 2004, pp.202-203). When the immigrants arrive in the United States, the promises are often empty and the immigrants find themselves in precarious living situations (multiple people living in single rooms) and employed by large, low-paying, industrial animal processing facilities owned by mega corporations such as Tyson, JBS, or Cargill (*Leading meat*, 2020; Cook, 2004, p.204). These large companies have agreements with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), in which I.C.E. notifies the management of future immigration raids and the corporations agree to turn in any undocumented workers (Cook, 2004, pp.206-207). The slaughterhouse management will withhold this information from workers and allow them to be deported, only to bring in a fresh supply of undocumented workers the next day with no consequences for their actions. Compound all of these factors with these groups' denigrated, "animalized" status and experiences of discrimination outside of the workplace due to racism, classism, and xenophobia to begin to understand the magnitude of the psychological toll of the violence in the slaughterhouse.

## **Critique of the Division Between Animal Rights, Slaughterhouse Labor, and Domestic Violence**

While the scholars and movements for domestic violence advocacy, animal rights, and slaughterhouse labor advocacy have robust and dedicated policy plans and strategies, industrialized animal agriculture and family violence are still prevalent and actively heightening issues in the United States (Polansek & Huffstutter, 2021; Rodriguez, 2021). There is growing public support for the critique of factory farms and an increased understanding of the severity and pervasiveness of domestic violence, but overall, the welfare of animals, workers, and families is still largely compromised and failed by our current institutions. Activists in all three domains are fiercely passionate about changemaking and have honed and transformed their approaches over time, attempting to adjust to the ever-changing needs of those they serve and the fast-growing problems. However, the three domains remain disparate in their framings of and solutions to their respective issues. In this section, I will expand my critiques of the segmented nature of these three arguments in the context of policymaking to mitigate the suffering caused by domestic violence and slaughterhouses.

It would not be accurate to claim that all of these movements are completely ignorant to the existence of the other or that they are solely single-focused on their own issue with no cognizance of how it might relate to other social movements. There are mainstream animal rights organizations, such as The Humane League, that explicitly acknowledge the suffering of workers in the slaughterhouse and who encourage supporters to view laborers as victims of the system (Coman-Hidy, 2020). There are also less well-established vegan food justice groups and organizations, such as Food Empowerment Project (FEP) or Vegans for Black Lives Matter, that acknowledge racial justice's place alongside animal rights (*Food Empowerment*, 2021;



*vegansfor*, 2021). There are domestic violence advocacy organizations who recognize the link between some forms of violence against animals and violence to humans. There are slaughterhouse labor advocates who value humane animal slaughter and who work against factory farms for nonhuman animals and human animals. However, the dominant framings of these movements and the subsequent policies for which these organizations advocate do not reflect a dedication to the integration of these movements. Even among the organizations that attempt to bring parts of the movements together, there is a glaring lack of recognition of the linkages between all three movements: slaughterhouse labor, domestic violence, and farmed animals within the slaughterhouse. These organizations do not talk with one another nor do they build theoretical or practical bridges between each other, but instead they work fairly independently and often even in contrast to one another.

Despite the success of domestic violence and slaughterhouse labor advocacy organizations with regards to crafting policies that actively consider the needs and experiences of marginalized communities, they both fail to address one of the key elements in the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence: violence to nonhuman animals. Neither area of advocacy seems to acknowledge slaughterhouse workers' exposure to farmed animal violence as worthy of action or care. This is not to say that individuals within these realms condone the violence present in slaughterhouses, but just that it is not deemed relevant enough to their causes to be included in their work. It is my argument that ignoring or failing to dedicate attention to this link is why these policy approaches have been ineffective thus far.

Within the realm of domestic violence advocacy, even with increasing awareness of the social and emotional roots of domestic violence, the impact of the slaughterhouse remains absent from this conversation. There are organizations dedicated to diminishing the role of the criminal

legal system within domestic violence response and prevention and replacing it with family counseling, toxic masculinity workshops, and improving one's community through an increase in green spaces and workplace and school training regarding domestic violence. The United States Government's Center for Disease Control (CDC) even published a report detailing their recommendations for these policies and their efficacy that the CDC has observed (Niolon et. al, 2017). However, despite the fact that these programs and policies attempt to get at the source of violence and acknowledge the systemic contexts which might move someone to violence, they do not address the context of the slaughterhouse. Counseling a community on how to communicate with their partners and family members in a nonviolent manner, how to make their workplace a safe and understanding environment for survivors of domestic violence, or how to recognize coworkers or peers who might be experiencing or perpetrating domestic violence is futile for slaughterhouse workers whose workplace reinforces acts of violence and exploitation. If one is to accept the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, the slaughterhouse is an inherent source of physical and emotional trauma for communities, so its conditions counteract any social and emotional work in which domestic violence advocacy organizations engage.

In the subsection titled "Racial Justice and Animal Rights," I identify two main scholars, Harris and Rodrigues, who critique the animal protection community and its lack of racial consciousness. Both Harris and Rodrigues make important contributions to the discussion of the potential bridges to be built between racial justice and animal rights. That being said, I argue that both authors fail to recognize the depth of the interconnectedness of the two movements. Firstly, Harris, while acknowledging the role that the animal protection movement plays in pushing away BIPOC, puts the onus on BIPOC to shift their mindset regarding animal rights by arguing that

they extend the compassion they desire for their own community to farmed animals. This is problematic in that it prescribes that BIPOC look beyond the racist messaging in the animal rights movement and it assumes that BIPOC are consciously choosing to exploit animals to make themselves feel superior as opposed to choosing compassion. The emphasis on choice creates a false narrative that Black people who are not actively engaged in veganism or supporting the vegan movement are doing so out of choice and not due to practical reasons (such as food apartheid or the cultural significance of meat-eating) (Food Apartheid, 2020). Most importantly, I argue that this is an oversimplification of the connection between racial justice and animal rights. The link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence demonstrates a direct correlation between farmed animal oppression and human oppression that must be further interrogated beyond just a lack of compassion. Secondly, Rodrigues' claim that one must address all forms of oppression in tandem fails to acknowledge the unique relationship between farmed animal oppression and racial justice. It is not just that the two are linked because they are both forms of oppression, but that they are specifically connected as forms of oppression. While many manufacturing workers in the U.S. experience exploitative labor conditions (long hours, few or no breaks, low wages, dangerous machinery), slaughterhouse communities have a unique link to domestic violence not present in other manufacturing communities and that is critical to understanding a way forward (Undocumented, 2014).

In addition to a glaring lack of racial justice in the animal protection movements, there is a dominant culture of patriarchy and sexual misconduct in the community. In the mid 2010s, when Tarana Burke began the #MeToo movement, the animal rights community had its own #ARMeToo movement. Most notably, in 2018, Wayne Pacelle, the Chief Executive Officer of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) lost his job due to sexual harassment

allegations from women who were former interns and employees at HSUS under Pacelle (Bosman et. al, 2018; Garcia, 2017). The women describe Pacelle both verbally and physically assaulting them, abusing his power as their superior, and violating their autonomy. According to an article from *The New York Times* detailing the matter, the Board of Directors completed an investigation into Pacelle's actions and found no wrongdoing. One of the board members (who has since resigned) is even on record saying, "which red-blooded male hasn't sexually harassed somebody?" followed by, "women should be able to take care of themselves" (Bosman et. al, 2018). While it is possible that these allegations were not true and that the women were lying, instances of survivors falsely accusing their abusers are rare and this was not the only incident of white men in positions of power within the animal rights community being accused of sexually abusing women (*Sexual Violence*, 2021). Advocates and activists from within the movement came forward explaining accusations against Pacelle as only the beginning of a reckoning that needs to occur. Shortly after the news about Pacelle, Hugo Dominguez, one of the organizers from Direct Action Everywhere (DXE), a prominent, animal rights activism organization known for controversial public protests at events like Nathan's Annual Hot Dog Eating contest, admitted to committing acts of sexual violence and abusing women (*Direct Action*, 2015; *Activists spray*, 2016; *The Latest*, 2017).

The animal rights movement is one where emotions run high and members are deeply passionate about the work that they do. This further exacerbates the severity and pervasiveness of sexual assault in the animal rights community, as employees are fiercely dedicated to their work and put into positions where they are asked to make sacrifices for the cause. Leaders and individuals in positions of power can then use this to manipulate vulnerable individuals. Additionally, leaders within organizations are lauded even more highly than CEOs of for-profit

companies because of their public contributions to the animal protection movement giving them “hero” status. Therefore, any attempts to hold them to account for their actions can be perceived as detrimental to the success of the movement, further fostering an environment that tolerates sexual assault and harrassment. A 2017 post by an anonymous guest author on the blog of Carol J. Adams, prominent animal rights activist and ecofeminist, highlights this aspect of the animal rights community and acts as a call to action for advocates and leaders in the movement to change the culture of the community (*Precursors*, 2017). Furthermore, Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE), a nonprofit organization recognized throughout the animal protection community as a highly regarded charity evaluator, published a post on the #ARMeToo movement, reporting that their 2017 evaluations uncovered a culture of sexual harassment and its cover up throughout animal-focused nonprofits as well as repeated accusations against certain individuals (McAuley, 2018). Though they did not release specific details or names involved in the incidents, they took a strong stance against the pervasive misogyny within the movement and voiced their forceful concerns that there is a need for these organizations to encourage survivors to come forward and to provide them with the support they need to combat this culture. While the movement did have a moment of reflection during the #ARMeToo, as with many systemic injustices, accountability and change must be a constant, active struggle. This is a prime example of how focusing too narrowly on a single issue allows other issues to fester. This is yet another deterrent to folks desiring to join the animal rights movement, particularly individuals from vulnerable communities in which domestic violence is already disproportionately present. And as violence to nonhuman animals and violence to humans is linked, this is also a hindrance to the achievement of animal rights.

My last critique is of the animal rights movement's goal to end animal agriculture. One seemingly simple solution to mitigate, and even eliminate, the effects of violence to animals within the slaughterhouse is to completely eradicate violence to animals within the slaughterhouse. If slaughterhouses cease to be socially acceptable and folks cease to be forced to kill farmed animals for employment, that is one less factor that could contribute to instances of domestic violence. While I do believe there are many reasons to end animal agriculture, on its own that does not have the intended effect that animal rights activists wish it would.

Unfortunately, the agricultural industry on the whole is an exploitative environment that preys on vulnerable populations regardless of whether the job is slicing cows or harvesting corn. Long hours, lack of healthcare, exposure to toxins (ex: pesticides), and the manipulation of immigrants and incarcerated folks are all trends within the entire agricultural industry (*US Labor Law*, 2021).

Though animal agriculture's elimination provides a remedy to its specific quality of violence to animals, simply ending one sector of agriculture will not solve the issues within the other sectors.

As disheartening as it may be that a solution is not as easy as the world going vegan or vegetarian, I do not think that this discredits the animal rights argument. Instead, I think this is further evidence for the argument that a multifaceted issue in a multifaceted world requires a multifaceted approach. The animal rights movement cannot stand alone, as it does not exist alone. It is imperative to resolve both the harmful effects of the violence within the slaughterhouse *and* the exploitation of vulnerable people within the slaughterhouse and agricultural industry at large (in their capacity as employees and in their overall social and economic vulnerability).

### **Theoretical Integration of Animal Rights, Labor Advocacy, and Domestic Violence**

In making sense of how these three movements are linked, I return to two authors, Morin and Deckha (see page 15), regarding the concepts of subhumanization and “carceral logic.” Both works, especially Morin’s, highlight the dynamic between the carceral system, racism, class, and animalization, some of the main points of concern within the realms of domestic violence, slaughterhouse labor, and farmed animal rights. Morin constructs the argument that while their experiences are notably different, the fact that we assign the political label of “animal” to certain nonhuman animals (farmed animals), deeming them commodifiable and disposable, is what allows us to do the same to certain groups of humans and vice versa (Morin, 2018). However, Morin’s work does not address the implications of slaughterhouse workers’ exposure to violence towards animals as it is linked to domestic violence nor what that means in the context of understanding the connections between the animalization of slaughterhouse workers and the farmed animals they slaughter. Workers in the slaughterhouse are largely BIPOC, immigrant, and incarcerated, all identities that occupy the “animal” status in American society. These “subhuman” workers have the task of further subordinating farmed animals and stripping any and all moral or political value from them. This subordination is often performed under duress, as the workers themselves lack true autonomy given their vulnerable statuses and the hierarchies within which they operate.

Using this framework of dehumanization, one can gleam multiple potential explanations of the existence of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence. One possibility is that the psychological toll of dehumanization within the slaughterhouse is such that workers use violence against loved ones as a way to wield some sort of power and control in a life in which they have little. Another possibility is that the animalization and subordination of the

slaughterhouse workers creates the conditions in which they are able to animalize and subordination others; not that it is a willing choice, but that they are dehumanized, forced to strip themselves of human emotions, and then forced to become comfortable with carrying out mass violence. This capacity to degrade other beings is so contrary to how we are socialized to behave that when they leave the walls of the slaughterhouse, workers are unable to fully transition back to the outside world and separate what is acceptable within the slaughterhouse from what is acceptable in their homes. This cognitive dissonance can lead to displays of violence in the home, as it can be difficult to maintain the distinction between the two sets of behaviors for indefinite periods of time. This is not to assume that killing animals inherently requires cognitive dissonance; hunting and killing animals for consumption is a long-used practice that is normalized and in line with shared, societal values in many communities. But it is to say that the way in which industrial slaughterhouse workers are required to carry out their jobs allows for torture, abuse, and extraneous violence to farmed animals beyond the role of their positions and beyond any normalized or socially acceptable method of killing animals. In any of these possible scenarios, it is the dehumanization of slaughterhouse workers which facilitates the use of them to slaughter en masse in an industrial facility, the dehumanization of BIPOC and women which subordinates survivors of domestic violence, and the dehumanization of farmed animals which releases the public from any need to care for the conditions or lives of animals in the slaughterhouse. It is not that this dehumanization or subordination is the same. But it is the fact that the subordination of one group, not only allows for, as Morin suggests, but actually facilitates the subordination of the other group.

The subordination of farmed animals contributes to the subordination of slaughterhouse workers within the workplace which, in turn, contributes to their subordination of farmed



animals. The workers are dehumanized and transformed into tools of slaughter requiring them to become desensitized to the violence and further devalue the lives of the farmed animals in the slaughterhouse. The devaluation of farmed animals allows for the consequent devaluation of issues related to farmed animals (e.g. the violence perpetrated against farmed animals in the slaughterhouse), both of which effectively devalue the loved ones who become survivors of domestic violence in slaughterhouse communities by contributing to the factors that lead to their abuse.

While Morin claims that it is the fact that we are able to subordinate any being that is problematic, I think that there is a need for particular care and attention here to distinguish that these subordinations beget one another, not just because they are subordinations, but because both their existence and the absence of their recognition reinforce one another in practice and in theory. Ignoring the ways in which they are interwoven allows the injustices to continue reinforcing one another, unabated. By minimizing animal rights issues in the slaughterhouse, one is effectively minimizing a key contributor to domestic violence and to slaughterhouse labor atrocities. The subordination of farmed animals and the consequent treatment that we accept for farmed animals is psychologically damaging and emotionally traumatic for slaughterhouse workers and contributes to an increase in domestic violence. Thus, the subordination and devaluation of farmed animals and marginalized communities and the suffering they face function to divide the movements that tackle these injustices. These divisions preclude the coordinated effort that is required to attack the root of these injustices and fully dismantle the systems that perpetrate them, functioning similarly to the “divide and conquer” strategies used by meatpacking corporations to provoke racial divisions among workers to prevent unionization. Furthermore, because of the demographic makeup of slaughterhouse workers and of survivors of

domestic violence and the unique experiences of BIPOC within both the spheres of the slaughterhouse and domestic violence, it is imperative that racial justice also be a key component of this movement. The toll that the exposure to violence towards animals takes on workers and the community exists within these contexts and must be addressed as such. It would not be possible to address the issue of slaughterhouse or domestic violence without acknowledging the different experiences had by folks with different identities.

This is distinct from the analysis of multidimensional liberation as outlined by Aph Ko (Ko, 2019). Ko's frame of multidimensional activism as opposed to intersectional is important in that it acknowledges that the issues of human and nonhuman animal oppression stem from the same white supremacy. I agree that the language of subordination and animalization that leads to the devaluing of farmed animals is the same language that allows for the devaluing of humans and that system of control and exploitation through dehumanization has been historically crafted by white supremacy (Ko, 2019, p.124) However, by not including the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, Ko misses a key aspect of my analysis: that this active devaluation of human and nonhuman animal life through racism, classism, xenophobia, speciesism, etc. in the slaughterhouse all reinforce each other through domestic violence and that the failure to recognize these issues as mutually reinforcing further supports their pervasiveness.<sup>7</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence concerns three currently disparate movements: domestic violence advocacy, slaughterhouse labor organizers, and animal rights. Despite the links between the movements, they have not achieved a concerted effort and, in fact, their activism is often in conflict with one another. Falling prey to an adherence to single-

issue advocacy, the movements fail to see the compounding nature of their causes and their shared roots and therefore miss out on potentially effective policy solutions. In this section, I present a new way for the movements to conceptualize the three issues in tandem while being mindful of the dangers of discussing the perils of nonhuman animals with humans, mainly regarding its racial implications. In the next and final section, I use this conceptualization to present a way forward and my policy recommendations for the three movements.

### **Practical Integration of Animal Rights, Labor Advocacy, and Domestic Violence**

My thesis seeks to better understand the issues of the industrial slaughterhouse through their connection to domestic violence in the United States with particular attention to the ways in which these issues disproportionately affect marginalized communities. In spite of the extensive efforts by the animal rights movement, slaughterhouse labor organizers, and domestic violence advocacy organizations, current policy approaches to these issues do not achieve their intended effects. Throughout my thesis I argue that it is not for lack of trying, but for lack of recognizing the truly interconnected nature of these realms, their causes, and their potential solutions. In this final section of my research, I focus on the way forward in terms of bringing the three movements together.

In the summer of 2020, there was a sort of racial reckoning in the United States with the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd by the police (Chang et. al, 2020). I use “sort of” because this was nothing new for Black Americans and other people of color who have continuously watched people who look like them be murdered by police since the creation of the police in this country. However, these deaths brought the conversation about racism to the forefront of the public’s attention for the first time in my lifetime. Workplaces’, social groups’, and individuals’ implicit biases and racist remarks and actions were exposed and those folks were held accountable, largely through social media and the power of the public’s newfound outrage at this racism they (largely white people) were just discovering was embedded throughout our society. Social media feeds were full of statements from institutions, organizations, corporations denouncing racism and white supremacy and standing in support of Black Lives Matter. Many of these statements were empty sentiments filled with lofty goals, however they publicly expressed intentions of anti-racism and solidarity with BIPOC. Moreover,

many groups took this as an opportunity to actually implement tangible changes to their leadership, members, and/or employees to reflect their desire to combat racism and its insidiousness (Guynn, 2020).

As someone who is involved in the animal protection movement, I decided to reach out to two prominent, nonprofit, animal welfare organizations, with whom I have professional and personal relationships and who had not made a statement (nor taken action) on the racist events of the summer. I expressed my personal discomfort with the lack of vocal support against racism from these organizations, explained the dissonance between their respective commitment to the community (including Black and brown folks) and their silence on the community's suffering, and finally, offered my time and support in crafting a statement and action items. Both organizations responded with similar worries that their messages might be perceived as pandering and one organization's Board of Directors (consisting of all white folks over the age of 40) made the decision to release a statement that made no mention of racism, police brutality, or Black lives. Instead, the statement broadly rejected cruelty and hate, prompting some supporters even to think that this message was about breed-specific legislation and not white supremacy and the murder of Black folks.<sup>8</sup>

This is an example of the way in which animal protection organizations choose not to engage in issues of racial justice due to an understanding that it would be deviating from their "role" in the world of social movements. This is a missed opportunity for animal advocates to acknowledge racial justice's role in their advocacy and it is particularly striking because it was an opportunity that was presented to them at a time when this topic was more popular than ever; so as to say they did not have to be trailblazers, but simply just hop on the bandwagon. Though these were animal welfare organizations and not farmed animal rights organizations, I still

believe that their inability to be vocal in that moment highlights the uphill battle that these movements have in achieving an integration between racial justice and animal protection overall. It is also important to note that these two organizations both acknowledge the link between companion animals and domestic violence and are active, founding members of a local chapter of the National Link Coalition. As such, it is clear that it is not sufficient just to recognize the existence of these links. A dedication to understanding the complexities of this link, why it exists, and the ways in which its many aspects, including race, buttress one another is required.

The events of summer 2020 combined with the rise of social media, in which the knowledge of individuals' experiences, to which one might not have had previous exposure, is now readily available, render it impossible for these organizations to focus on single-issue advocacy and still proclaim dedication to their causes. There are no longer excuses that can be made for an ignorance of racism in the U.S. and, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this research, an effective approach to animal protection requires racial justice. My analysis of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence brings to light the ways in which these issues are not only linked in their occurrence, but in their roots and in their potential solutions. The violence and suffering within both of these realms is rooted in subordination and exploitation built on systemic racism. Furthermore, the ignorance or refusal of the interconnectedness of these types of suffering allows for the excusal of their existence and inhibits the formation of a robust policy response that could address the full breadth and depth of the issues.

The animal protection movement, the domestic violence advocacy movement, and slaughterhouse labor advocates all stand to benefit from recognizing the linkages between one another and the reinforcing nature of their issues. There are organizations from each domain that

address one or parts of the other domains' issues, however there is no organization that looks at all three together as compounding and interrelated movements. These movements lack a unified consciousness of the shared context in which their issues breed and take shape. This would require an active understanding of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence including the disproportionate effect of the link on marginalized communities (BIPOC, incarcerated folks, immigrants, low-income folks) and the physical and emotional exploitation of both humans and farmed animals within the slaughterhouse.

### **Recommendations: A Way Forward for Organizations and Movement Leaders**

The frames used to understand an issue define the solutions that one imagines for the issue. Currently, the framing of domestic violence, slaughterhouse labor advocacy, and animal rights prescribe individualized policy approaches centering each respective movement without fully embracing the linkages between the three or the racial context in which they exist. Moving forward, these organizations could benefit from framing their respective issues as having root causes influenced by one another to effectively address the complexities of both the problems and solutions and to address the racial injustices intertwined in all three domains.

Firstly, and most pressingly, animal rights organizations ought to move away from a movement rooted in compassion and towards an approach rooted in racial justice. Animal rights groups, as many social justice movements, use a combination of grassroots outreach, corporate partnerships, and government lobbying to achieve their goals. All of those different branches of activism are critical for achieving social change. As far as grassroots outreach, the prevailing narrative within animal rights is one of compassion (*Compassionate Choices*, n.d.; *Holiday Compassion*, 2017; Harris, 2009, p.32). Choosing to be vegan and choosing not to support the murder of farmed animals is to choose to be compassionate to all. Choosing to eat meat, on the

other hand, is failing to exhibit compassion. While refraining from eating meat can reflect one's compassion for farmed animals, this framing of the movement is reductive in that it facilitates the dismissal and exclusion of racial justice in the movement. By explaining veganism and animal rights as primarily a choice to be compassionate to animals, there is no need for a discussion of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence or the disproportionate impact that slaughterhouses have on marginalized communities. Thus, the animal rights movement has chosen compassion as its movement's dominant motivating factor and failed to address the scope of the harm caused by the slaughterhouse.

A shift in focus from compassion to racial justice would require an understanding that the violence in the slaughterhouse towards farmed animals is facilitated by the subordination of marginalized groups of people, thus giving the animal rights movement a responsibility to address the suffering of humans in and around the slaughterhouse. And to address that suffering the movement must address the systems in which those humans operate. One example of this could be the overhaul of the Agricultural Industrial Complex (AIC). The existence of the AIC allows for the existence of the slaughterhouse and its horrific conditions and it is the reason that potential alternatives to violence to farmed animals, like plant-based agriculture, still exploit marginalized groups. From the monopolization of agriculture by huge corporations (including seed companies like Monsanto, now known as Bayer, as well as the "Big Four" meatpacking corporations and produce companies like Dole Food Company) to immigration policy that ensures the vulnerability of workers, the animal rights community has an opportunity to broaden the scope of their activism to be sensitive to the context of interacting oppressions within and around the slaughterhouse (Baptiste, 2017; *Dole Food*, n.d.).



The current “compassionate choices” framing also fails in that it furthers the false narrative of choice that consumers have in the U.S. and demonizes BIPOC who “choose” not to make compassionate choices through the consumption of meat or employment at a slaughterhouse (a choice which I have explained is really only a semblance of choice for many in these communities). Even organizations that acknowledge the issues of food justice within veganism center their messaging around choices individuals make with regard to the purchase and consumption of different foods (*Food Empowerment*, 2021). This messaging assumes that the audience receiving it has autonomy over their food and employment options and that they get to decide within which systems they exist and which systems they uphold. The relevant audience for this message is a privileged group that has the economic capacity to truly make their own food and employment choices, and, as this notion of “compassionate choices” is grassroots messaging, this excludes a large portion of BIPOC communities and potential allies to their cause. This messaging also assumes that people care about whether animal rights organizations believe the choices they make are compassionate. However, these organizations do not work to build trust or rapport within BIPOC communities. Instead, they cater their advocacy to a privileged, mainly white audience, leaving BIPOC neglected by and largely uninterested in the animal rights movement. The grassroots message, then, should be directed towards a wider audience that includes marginalized communities and addresses their needs, both to give BIPOC the freedom to engage in the movement and to acknowledge that the injustices to farmed animals and marginalized groups buttress one another within the slaughterhouse. Framing veganism and animal rights as a way to promote racial justice as opposed to promoting compassion can be one way to achieve this.

It is important, however, that this promotion of racial justice in the animal rights community not stem from racial justice's ability to further the animal rights movement. While statements of solidarity are important first steps in taking a stand against white supremacy, they are not sufficient and they are particularly ineffective when the organizations and individuals crafting and broadcasting them do not fully understand the significance of racial justice within animal rights. This requires a recognition that there cannot be animal liberation from suffering without human liberation from suffering, along with a refusal to accept progress for justice for farmed animals at the expense of or lack of progress for humans. Hence, the reframing of animal rights as an issue of racial justice must be centered around the experiences and voices of marginalized groups, as opposed to the use of whiteness as the face of and general guide for activism.

I present this as the most pressing recommendation because of the unique responsibility that I believe the animal rights movement has to racial justice. Firstly, the animal rights philosophy is based on the idea that nonhuman animals deserve compassion, respect, and, most importantly, life. Organizations within the animal rights movement and the animal protection movement overall have mission statements that are filled with the keywords "compassion," "love," and "humane." If this is truly the motivation for animal activists, which in my experience it is, then it is wildly inappropriate for the movement to neglect human animals who are deprived of compassion, respect, and often life, as well.

Secondly, the animal rights movement claims to be the "voice for the voiceless"; animal rights activists fight for nonhuman animals who cannot vote or protest or speak up for themselves. In this way, I believe that these activists have given themselves the responsibility to listen to and learn from new voices and perspectives in order to constantly adapt the movement

to fit the newest visions for a humane world. Organizational leaders reverting back to comfortable ideas or methods of advocacy, attempting to protect and save animals without paying mind to the political or social contexts are effectively doing more harm than good to the animals for whom they claim to work. Relying on established professional and personal networks to hire the same demographics of leaders, alienating supporters dedicated to dismantling the systemic racism and other oppressions these organizations dismiss, as well as lacking a consciousness of the linked and racialized nature of violence (to both humans and nonhuman animals) within and around the slaughterhouse all inhibit the success of the movement's work. This concept can also be applied to other dynamics present in animal protection organizations, including misogyny and the culture of sexual assault. Misogyny and sexual violence of any kind are particularly dangerous in the animal protection movement because of the way that toxic masculinity functions in the slaughterhouse and the way that the dismissal of domestic violence functions to reinforce the subordination of animals in the slaughterhouse. Members of the animal protection movement ought to be willing and eager to address any and all oppressions that contribute to animal suffering, including the oppressions present in their own workplaces. Prioritization of nonhuman animals' rights or wellbeing at the expense of overlooking the movement's contribution to systemic injustices is both hypocritical and counterproductive to helping animals.

Thirdly, the onus is not on BIPOC and other marginalized groups to look beyond the racism or the disregard for racial justice in the animal protection movement. Marginalized communities in the U.S. are not responsible for accepting the trauma of racism or denial of their experiences. On the contrary, it *is* the job of the predominantly white leadership teams and movement leaders to make the animal protection community supportive and inviting for BIPOC.

Amplifying white voices and refusing to speak on issues affecting humans in order to “stay in their lane” solidify the notion that animal protection is a privileged space and a movement only for people who do not have their own oppressions to think about or combat. By confining their activism to a narrow understanding of nonhuman animal issues, the movement is reinforcing the idea that you have to choose between racial justice and animal rights. In reality, no one who is truly an animal advocate believes that only white people can or should care about animals; true animal advocates want as many people to care about animals as possible.

There is also an opportunity for slaughterhouse labor advocacy organizations to reframe their work to consider the aspects of the slaughterhouse that the animal protection movement tackles well: violence to nonhuman animals. The labor advocacy movement ought to look at the laborer as a whole person with physical, economic, and emotional needs. While ensuring livable wages, employer accountability for exploitation, workplace safety, and access to healthcare are all essential to the amelioration of the quality of life for slaughterhouse employees, this excludes a fundamental aspect of one’s quality of life: psychological and emotional well-being. The emotional toll of the slaughterhouse is not just relevant for animal lovers and vegans; as evidenced by the ethnographic accounts in an earlier section (see page 42), the trauma of the job follows the worker beyond the walls of the slaughterhouse. This trauma is not limited to witnessing and carrying out the killing and torture of farmed animals, but also includes the “divide and conquer” strategies of slaughterhouse management to pit workers against one another and the degradation of denying them basic human needs by forcing them to wear diapers and withholding bathroom breaks. And while policies to improve working conditions and ensure employers guarantee human rights within the slaughterhouse would in theory prevent the latter atrocities, exposure to violence towards animals is currently not accounted for in the policies of

slaughterhouse labor advocates. This is a clear gap in activism, as justice for a group must involve their right to mental health and the mental health of slaughterhouse workers has been shown to have effects not just on the workers themselves, but on their families and intimate partners.

However, it is not sufficient to solely provide therapy or other mental health services to workers so that they can cope with the trauma of the workplace. While therapy is effective in processing traumatic experiences, the goal of trauma therapy is not to make it easier to expose oneself to the trauma, but to process past trauma and protect oneself as much as possible from repeated trauma. If therapy was the only resource for dealing with trauma from the slaughterhouse while conditions remained the same, workers and mental health professionals would face an ever-growing, uphill battle to keep up with the mounting trauma. Additionally, because workers are disproportionately from marginalized communities, they already face an immense amount of trauma in daily life. Black and brown folks are constantly exposed to the murders of their community members, children, and loved ones due to racism and the perceived threat their existence poses to white people in the U.S. Immigrants in the U.S. often live in fear of deportation or of being locked in cages and separated from their families, resulting in them having to remain guarded and careful not to garner the attention of law enforcement or immigration services. To accept that the slaughterhouse will just be another place of trauma for these communities and that mental health services, a reactive response to the harm, could suffice as a viable solution is another form of racism and exploitation of these groups. It is inappropriate to decide that the workers in the slaughterhouse can handle the emotional toll of the slaughterhouse, particularly when that exposure to violence is compounded with the trauma that BIPOC in the U.S. are already forced to experience. Instead, we should be working towards the

elimination of the sources of trauma, including exposure to violence to farmed animals in the slaughterhouse. Labor advocacy groups, then, have a responsibility to include animal rights in their movement as it is directly connected to the suffering they are working to end. Addressing this gap, however, requires collaboration between animal rights and slaughterhouse labor advocates, and relies on the implementation of my primary recommendation by the animal protection community to ensure that BIPOC are represented and welcomed into the animal advocacy movement.

With regard to the domestic violence advocacy movement, I look to the National Link Coalition to address potential recommendations. Because the National Link Coalition already recognizes the link between violence to nonhuman animals and violence to humans, they are well-positioned to carry out my vision for the integration of these movements. However, some framing adjustments to the National Link Coalition are necessary in order to facilitate this integration. Firstly, the coalition would benefit from expanding its recognition of the link to include farmed animals and the slaughterhouse. By defining slaughterhouse violence as traumatic and recognizing that exposure to violence towards animals as a potential contributor to and indicator of future violence, the coalition can widen the scope of their advocacy to more comprehensively address the factors linked to domestic violence. With this more expansive understanding of violence to nonhuman animals, the coalition can work towards both short-term methods to mitigate the effects of exposure to violence to animals and long-term strategies to eradicate the exposure and the violence altogether. Having the National Link Coalition, an already established and respected organization, acknowledge the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence will also contribute to the legitimacy of the link and position them as a key leader of the integration of these movements. This will also give the effects of violence

towards farmed animals some much needed publicity and attention in front of other member organizations of the coalition.

Secondly, the National Link Coalition also has an opportunity to adapt its response to the link and rethink its partnership with law enforcement. Acknowledging that domestic violence is linked with violence to nonhuman animals helps one to better understand the root of domestic violence and the early signs of potential violence. However, if one's response to those early signs is solely or grossly dependent on the criminal legal system (which, as I described, is not an effective tool to combat domestic violence), knowledge of the link is futile. The link aims to provide context for the perpetration of violence and the criminal legal system ignores context (besides race) and focuses solely on bad individuals doing bad, uncontextualized deeds. Therefore, the National Link Coalition, with its emphasis on the link and its context, should abandon the criminal legal system approach in exchange for broadening its response to focus on systemic issues that lead to the link.

Moreover, to create a racial justice-inclusive, linked approach to domestic violence and the slaughterhouse, all of the movements must work towards the abolition of the carceral state and the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). Both acts of domestic violence and violence within the slaughterhouse concern actions that fall outside of societal norms. Physical and emotional violence perpetrated in the slaughterhouse or at home are not considered socially acceptable behavior and therefore, the movements working to stop these behaviors focus heavily on the ideas of justice and consequences. Activists ultimately want to prevent these harmful behaviors, so they often utilize methods of punishment (e.g. the policing and carceral system) to deter the violence that they see as "criminal." The PIC is a tool by which the government perpetuates the subjugation of BIPOC and it contributes to the perpetuation of violence against farmed animals

(through providing a labor force to slaughterhouses) and inadequate (and often harmful) responses to domestic violence. Still, organizations work alongside law enforcement and the criminal legal system to solve problems (such as animal cruelty or domestic violence) that these systems, in fact, worsen.

Organizations involved in improving slaughterhouse conditions or addressing domestic violence ought to look to abolitionist organizations, such as Critical Resistance, for strategies that will account for the PIC's role in these injustices. Instead of advocating for harsher penalties for those who commit acts of violence to nonhuman animals or to human animals, organizations might instead seek out pathways to restorative justice and mental health resources for those folks (*The Critical*, n.d.). Transitioning relationships with law enforcement to relationships with community accountability groups, slaughterhouse labor organizers, animal protection organizations (animal welfare, animal rights, farmed animals, and companion animals), and mental health organizations could actually address and dismantle the systems that contribute to domestic violence as opposed to focusing on arresting individuals. This will also require a reenvisioning of the implementation of legislation to protect nonhuman animals and humans in the workplace, household, and in their communities. Organizations advocating for legislation, such as criminal penalties, that responds to issues as opposed to preventing issues will need to rethink the efficacy of their policies. Legal action can be an effective tool for accountability, but on its own, it emphasizes individual responsibility over systemic injustice. Additionally, the systems in place to enforce legislation are almost exclusively based in law enforcement and they expand the PIC. Instead, the implementation of structures of community accountability, combined with legislation to support those communities might be a more fruitful approach than the current method of response.



My research posits that in order to effectively address domestic violence, slaughterhouse labor injustices, and animal rights it is necessary to view the slaughterhouse and domestic violence as compounding injustices built on subordinations that reinforce one another. Above, I presented what I understand to be the implications of adopting this conceptualization with regard to each respective movement's approaches to advocacy. However, my theory complements other theories as well. One complementary theory that I encourage these movements to explore is racial capitalism. In the context of the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, racial capitalism is insufficient in its explanation of the linked oppressions. While capitalism, especially the way that it is currently implemented in the United States, considers profit-maximization as the ultimate goal of society and champions profit at all costs (costs which are often paid by BIPOC and other marginalized groups), it is only one aspect of the many injustices present within and around the slaughterhouse. And while the economic and racial dynamics involved in industrial animal agriculture and domestic violence are crucial to contextualizing the issues, the idea of racial capitalism neglects the concept of violence towards nonhuman animals and animal protection. Because of this omission, racial capitalism can help to make sense of the economic state in which industrial animal agriculture and domestic violence persist, it cannot fully contend with these domains and their confluences.

However, despite its inability to fully address the link between slaughterhouses and domestic violence, I urge these movements to consider racial capitalism in conjunction with and as supplementary to the framing and recommendations I have set forth. Slaughterhouse labor conditions, the treatment of farmed animals, and domestic violence all have roots in the economic institutions in the U.S. While these are all traditionally defined as social movements, it is necessary to acknowledge their context within the capitalist economy. Each of the movements

respectively address economic inequality and the economy's role in perpetuating these issues, however they do not address the system itself nor its racist foundations. Domestic violence advocacy organizations work to improve economic security to prevent stressors that can lead to domestic violence and to give survivors autonomy in their attempt to escape abusers. Animal rights organizations rally consumer demand for plant-based products to convince corporations of the economic advantages to reducing meat production and the consumer consequences of not. Slaughterhouse labor advocates organize and lobby for fair wages and employer accountability to ensure there are safeguards to prevent the exploitation of workers who are financially dependent on slaughterhouse employment. However, none of these solutions alter the system in which these injustices occur; they are only superficial adjustments that work within the system to lessen the harmful effects of the system. Expansion of welfare programs to enhance economic security or making plant-based meat profitable for corporations or accountability for employers are all well-meaning, yet futile when economic inequality is rooted in a capitalist system that is tied to racism and white supremacy. As long as the goal of our economic system is to maximize profit and that system functions to uphold the power of the ruling class through the racialization and othering of the lower class, advocates will face a constant cycle of needing to develop new topical solutions to each inequality and injustice. To truly confront the issues that engender injustices within industrial animal agriculture and domestic violence, both of which are disproportionately experienced by BIPOC and other marginalized groups, the racial capitalist system must be dismantled and transformed.

## **Conclusion**

Domestic violence and industrial animal agriculture are two facets of the U.S. society that continue to persist despite fervent efforts from social movements and organizations. #MeToo

spurred nationwide reckonings with toxic masculinity and sexual violence and products such as Impossible Meat and Beyond Burgers brought veganism into the public's eye, and yet neither problem seems to be fading away anytime soon (Fang, 2020; Samuel, 2020). In fact, the recent COVID-19 pandemic led to the worsening of both. Thirty-three percent of white women and over 50 percent of folks with marginalized identities reported experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic (Kluger, 2021). Slaughterhouses became hotspots for COVID-19, with major meat-packing facilities experiencing outbreaks due to a disregard for workers, a lack of personal protective equipment, and overcrowding on the kill floor (Corkery & Yaffe-Bellany, 2020; *The Meatpacking Industry*, 2021). The pandemic confined much of America to their homes and caused a wave of apocalyptic panic sending many people on buying sprees at the grocery store that contributed to a disruption in the food supply chain. With U.S. residents desperate for their food products, particularly meat, these workers were required to continue working throughout the pandemic to meet consumer needs and company demands. These workers, largely from marginalized communities, were forced to expose themselves to the virus to remain employed, in the midst of a pandemic that already disproportionately affected BIPOC, immigrants, and incarcerated folks due to these groups' lack of access to healthcare and medical resources (*Health Equity*, 2021).

My thesis centers the failings of the current policy approaches and the movements working to combat these injustices. My research identifies the slaughterhouse as a potential theater through which to establish the interconnectedness of animal rights, labor rights, and domestic violence using the quantitative link between communities with slaughterhouses and increased rates of domestic violence in those communities. Using the lens of the link, I conclude that the shortcoming of these individual movements is the framing of their causes as distinct

issues lacking contextualization within race. I argue that the three realms are actually compounding in nature and that the existence and perpetuation of each reinforces and impels the existence and perpetuation of the others. Specifically, I argue that failing to acknowledge that the subordination required to create these systems of injustices links these issues together enables the persistence of these injustices. Accordingly, I propose ways in which each movement might alter its framing and policy response to more accurately reflect this confluence, primarily emphasizing the inclusion of racial justice and vigilance against violence towards farmed animals.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>“Nonhuman animal” refers to pigs, cows, chickens, cats, dogs, or any other animal that is not a human. Throughout my work I often specify animals as nonhuman or human. The use of nonhuman animals is to demonstrate that humans are animals as well. Further, because a bulk of my research discusses animalization, I find the specification to be an important distinction to make.

<sup>2</sup>Farmed animals are animals used in agriculture such as cows, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. I use the term “farmed animals” as opposed to “farm animals” to emphasize the

somewhat arbitrary nature of which animals are deemed to belong on the farm and thus be suitable for consumption. By highlighting that the animals are being farmed, as opposed to the animals inherently existing for the farm, I aim to bring attention to the active role that humans play in creating and reinforcing the structures that allow for nonhuman animals to be commodified and turned into food.

<sup>3</sup>While both are concerned with the wellbeing of animals, animal welfare focuses on humane treatment of nonhuman animals and a reduction of nonhuman animal suffering, while animal rights focuses on a broader push for animals to be free from all human use and exploitation (Freeman, 2014, p.85). For the purpose of my research, I will largely focus on the animal rights community because of its emphasis on the eradication of violence to animals, the unique quality of the slaughterhouse that contributes to domestic violence. However, when needed, I will use the term animal protection to broadly refer to the two movements as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> Plant-based diet refers to a diet free from animal products (animal milk, meat, poultry, eggs, and sometimes honey). Veganism refers to a belief or lifestyle that refrains from the use of nonhuman animals by humans. This includes the use of nonhuman animals for food, scientific research (animal testing), entertainment (circuses, TV shows, aquariums, SeaWorld), or any other products (fashion, furniture, etc.). While veganism incorporates more than just food, the two terms are used interchangeably in the context of food, as individuals who ascribe to either refrain from the consumption of animal products.

<sup>5</sup> Both types of industrial complexes involve the government's role in supporting and conspiring to protect profit-making corporations, oftentimes at the expense of others. The Agricultural Industrial Complex (AIC) is the system of large-scale, industrial agricultural production in the United States that is economically supported by the government through



subsidies and legislative priorities that preserve the interests of agricultural corporations (Morin, 2018, p.19). The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) describes “the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems” (What is the PIC?, 2021). The PIC includes economic and legislative support from the government to private carceral facilities, as well as the monetization of the criminal legal system by methods such as bail and the usage of incarcerated folks for cheap labor framed as “rehabilitation” (Amuchie, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Companion animal refers to animals that have been domesticated and considered companions for humans including dogs, cats, guinea pigs, hamsters, and sometimes horses.

<sup>7</sup> Speciesism is the belief that one species is superior to another and allows for the discrimination on the basis of species. Most commonly, this term is used by those in the animal rights movement to argue that the societal norm to use and consume certain nonhuman animals is rooted in a bias against nonhuman animal species, valuing their lives above the lives of human animals.

<sup>8</sup> Breed-specific legislation (BSL) are pieces of legislation instituted by legislatures that restrict or prohibit the owning of certain breeds of dogs (or dogs who resemble certain breeds) in certain areas (What is Breed-Specific, n.d.). These laws are notorious for targeting the “pit bull breed” which, though commonly mistaken for a dog breed, is actually an umbrella term for multiple “bully breeds” including American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, American Pitbull Terrier, etc (Braby, 2021). BSL also targets doberman pinschers, rottweilers, and other dog breeds believed to be inherently dangerous or aggressive. BSL can also refer to policies held by companies such as leasing offices and insurance companies which refuse to house or insure dogs of particular breeds due to their perceived increased risk of liability. BSL is

troubling for the animal protection community, as it unfairly targets breeds (an often arbitrary determination with the increasing prevalence of shelter dogs), which have little to no bearing on the behavior of an animal, instead of focusing on the people who socialize and train dogs to be aggressive (DNA studies, 2016; Casey et. al, 2014).

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